RELIGION AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

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PREFACE

THE following pages have grown out of a course of lectures which was delivered in the University of Leeds during the Lent term of 1925, under the somewhat ambitious title of *The New Testament in the Thought of To-day.* The University of Leeds has no faculty of Theology, but is accustomed to invite some outsider to deliver a course of public lectures on what is called *Bible-Study* each year. Considerable latitude in the interpretation of the title is allowed.

Many of those who attend the lectures are not members of the University, and the course has therefore more affinity with what is called University Extension work than with anything to be expected from a Divinity Professor. The lectures must be simple in substance, and couched in untechnical language: they must explain many points with which all professional scholars have long been familiar. Their object must be rather to popularize knowledge than to advance it.

My experience when delivering this course confirmed an opinion which I have held for a good many years, namely, that there is real need for work of this kind, at any rate in the large industrial towns of the north of England. Attempts to meet it are few: perhaps opportunities for making them are not very numerous. Sermons preached in church can do very little, partly because the time available is too short. The Workers' Educational Association does not (I believe) on principle touch religious topics. Attempts have been made, going back as far as 1912, to fill this gap by organizing what are called Church Tutorial Classes on lines parallel with the work of the Association. In the north of England at any rate the development of this scheme is hampered by lack of competent tutors with leisure to undertake the work. This difficulty seems likely to increase rather than to diminish.

Meanwhile the need for simple instruction is urgent and increasing. We are accustomed to say, and I think with truth, that the force of tradition is much less in England now than it was at the beginning of the century. Nothing is more affected by this than religion. And nowhere is the breakdown of tradition more conspicuous than with regard to religion.

This is not in itself entirely a matter for regret. Views have been held about the Bible for a sufficient length of time to be called *traditional* which did not rest on any solid foundation. It is a matter of common knowledge that this foundation—such as it was—has been completely undermined by the work of scholars. What is less well understood is what other foundations have been laid, or what sort of superstructure is being erected upon them. The Bible is not read as it used to be because there is an idea abroad that it is not worth reading. There is a vague feeling that Christianity—or at any rate anything resembling in any way the orthodox Christianity of the past—has been thoroughly discredited, and admits of no rational defence. Religion is considered to be a matter of taste and opinion, and is seldom discussed from any other standpoint. Yet I believe it would be untrue to say that interest in religion has diminished. The output of religious literature is very large: and the space devoted to matters religious and ecclesiastical by the daily press is not inconsiderable. (It appears to be much larger in the north of England than in London.)

What I am most afraid of is a complete separation between the world of Christian learning, with its principal *foci* at Oxford and Cambridge, and the much larger world beyond, where the religion of the nation as a whole stands or falls. The gap is already dangerously wide: if it should become much wider there may be a real disaster. Each world is almost entirely ignorant of the way in which the other thinks. The academic world cannot help the ordinary church-goer, or newspaper-reader, because it does not know what his difficulties are and has never learned to talk any language which he can hope to understand.

I believe that the greatest need of the moment is to try to make some sort of bridge—be it only a narrow and uncertain plank—between these widely separated worlds. This was what I had in view when delivering my lectures. The interest which they appeared to arouse led me to think that it might be worth while to expand them and give them permanent form. They contain nothing which will be new to any scholar. But the ordinary church-goer who wishes to be able to return a reason for the faith which is in him may find in them some things which are unfamiliar and not easily accessible to him elsewhere.

Recent discussions about the new Prayer Book have revealed the existence of some confusion in certain minds as to the place and authority of Scripture in the Church. It might be more accurate to say As to the relation between the Bible and the Church. This is plainly a point of some importance; and it is, to say the least, not unlikely that our views about it have been considerably modified by fuller knowledge of Christian origins. There are probably few people now, except American 'Fundamentalists', who would be able to accept precisely the view of Scripture which was held by Sir Thomas Browne when he wrote his famous *Religio Medici* in 1635. Certainly there ought to be none. It may therefore be worth while to sketch briefly the process by which the Canon of the New Testament came into being and acquired its supremacy. If it is impossible to define Inspiration, the steps by which certain writings came to be regarded as inspired are not unimportant. Knowledge of the process can hardly fail to affect the way in which we ought to regard the result.

In a book which is primarily about the Bible a chapter on *Christian Ethics*, and one on *Institutional Religion*, with special reference to the Church of England, may appear out of place. In reality they are not, I think, irrelevant to my general purpose.

For the readers whom I contemplate Christian Ethics begin and end with what they would describe as *the teaching of the Bible*. There is, admittedly, some difficulty in determining exactly what this teaching is, and more in applying it to life as we have got to live it.

I have therefore tried to outline very roughly the nature of some of the problems to which those who uphold Christian ethical standards must apply themselves, and to indicate the line along which I believe the solution is to be found. On both these points there is some perceptible confusion in the public mind.

Emphasis has been laid upon the relation of Christianity to the facts of history. This does not imply that the Catholic Faith is an entirely static thing, or that Christianity is not still in process of being understood. But the Christian thinker has certain definite material provided for him, with and on which to work. He is not, as it were, sailing without a compass over uncharted oceans of pure speculation.

Partly for this reason the Christian religion has been embodied in institutions from the earliest period of which our knowledge allows us to speak positively. I see no reason to suppose that it would continue to exist for very long without them. As far as England is concerned the keystone of what might be called the Institutional Arch is the Church of England. If that were to crumble all forms of protestantism in this country would collapse. The reverberation would be felt throughout the whole world.

For this reason I have ventured to add a concluding chapter containing some observations on the position and prospects of the Church of England, which are matters of more than purely domestic interest. I have tried to sketch the events of the last three centuries as far as they affect the Church directly, because I believe that the nature of many of the difficulties which the Church has had to meet is imperfectly understood. Many—perhaps most—people to-day seem to have very little knowledge of what the Church has really done to equip itself for its work.

A book which does not profess to be much more than a compilation necessarily owes much to many sources. Any failure to acknowledge this in any particular instance is due to inadvertence.

My largest single creditor is the Provost of Eton College. By accepting the dedication he has enabled me to make some payment not only of this immediate debt but of a heavier obligation, the beginnings of which go back nearly thirty years.

My thanks are due to the Bishop of Oxford for his great kindness in reading the manuscript, for the encouragement which he has given me, and for the valuable suggestions which he has made.

As on former occasions, I owe a very great deal to my wife for her patient labour in preparing my manuscript for the press, and for her criticism of certain points.

R. H. M.

HEADINGLEY, *October* 1927.

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I. INTRODUCTORY

THE most distinctive characteristic of the civilization of modern Europe is the immense additions which have been made to the sum of human knowledge. Indeed it would not be too much to say that civilization as we understand it consists in adding to the sum of knowledge in every direction to the utmost limit of our capacity. In this respect our conception is in sharp contrast with that which underlies the older civilizations of China and India. They appear to have become satisfied with their achievements many centuries ago, and to have assumed a static condition which, so far as we can see, might have been prolonged indefinitely had it not been disturbed by contact with ourselves.

For more than four centuries the history of European civilization has been the history of the expansion of the intellectual horizon of our race and of the changes, moral and material, which this expansion has brought in its train.

The beginning of the process may be placed in the fifteenth century, when the revival of learning led to what really amounted to a re-discovery of the masterpieces of Greek and Latin antiquity, and when the invention of printing made the diffusion of knowledge possible on a scale undreamed of before. Other landmarks in the early stages were the finding of the New World and the discovery of Galileo that this earth is not the fixed centre of the universe.

From the fifteenth century onwards discovery and invention have succeeded each other with a rapidity which tends to increase rather than to diminish with the passage of years. No one can hope to master now more than a very small fraction of all that there is to be known, and however narrowly a student may specialize, continual work is necessary to prevent a considerable portion of his attainments from becoming obsolete. Knowledge is no longer comparable with a well-defined field which can be conquered; it is more like a vast river which rushes onward with ever-increasing speed and volume, and those who sail upon it cannot tell what they will find when they have rounded the next bend.

It would be beside the point to inquire whether all this has really added to the sum of human happiness or whether it is likely to do so at any future time. The process has been going on in Europe for more than four centuries. It cannot be checked by any artificial means, and there is nothing to suggest that it is even nearing any natural limit. If there is any limit to what can be known we are not yet in a position to say where it lies.

During the last hundred years, partly in consequence of mechanical inventions of various kinds, the expansion of knowledge has been more rapid than during any previous century. There is hardly any subject on which the ideas which are generally accepted by educated people to-day are not entirely different from those which were accepted in the reign of King George IV. The world in which we live has become very unlike the world in which our grand-parents were born, and we are compelled to look at even the most familiar things with very different eyes.

Astronomers assure us that the universe, if finite, is at least of a magnitude which the human mind cannot grasp. In place of the terrestrial measurements to which we are accustomed they have been obliged to take as their unit a *Lightyear*: that is to say the distance traversed by a beam of light, at a uniform velocity of 186,000 miles per second, in a year. There are stars so distant that the light from them takes centuries to reach us. Not only is our earth not the centre of everything, the sun itself is a comparatively insignificant star which is hastening through space towards a destination of which we can know nothing. It is not impossible that many other stars are the centre of planetary systems like the one to which we belong.

If the astronomers have altered and enlarged our conception of the universe the physicists have been no less busy with the material of which the earth is made. Every piece of the matter which we used to regard as solid inert stuff has now been shown to be a vortex of energy. First it was discovered that the matter of which we are conscious consists of a number of atoms so small as to elude our senses. These atoms are not quiescent but in a state of high activity, so that if this cumulative energy could be applied to any purpose we should find that we had in a stone, a clod of earth, or any other common object, a force far exceeding that of the highest explosive known. At one time atoms were believed to be indivi-

sible units, but they have now been resolved into protons;[1] and protons have in their turn been shown to be composed of a number of electrons. We appear now to have reached the conclusion that every form of matter known to us, however hard, solid, and inert it may seem to be, is at bottom a form of electrical energy. That does not, however, explain its constitution, because we are not yet in a position to say what electricity really is. Possibly we never shall be. We are therefore compelled to say that while many forms of matter are known to us, and it is within our power to use them in various ways for our own purposes, we do not really know anything about the stuff of which the world is made. We can only declare that it is in fact totally unlike what it appears to be to our senses. And this may seem to point to the conclusion that the universe is not the work of God, as Christians have been accustomed to use the phrase, but merely the manifestation of an unending, unconscious, finite energy for which such words as *Good* and *Evil* can have no meaning of any kind.

When we have listened to the revolutionary pronouncements of the astronomers and physicists, the biologists take up their parable.

They assure us that the existing forms of life which we see now, including our own, did not originate independently. They have developed gradually from a much smaller number of much simpler forms, and this development has been spread over a number of years which we cannot hope to measure with any approach to accuracy. It is certainly possible, perhaps probable if not certain, that they have all developed from one source by a process which has been labelled *Evolution*.

There seems to be some divergence of opinion as to whether the course which life has in fact followed has been determined by the necessity on the part of the living organism of adapting itself to the surroundings in which it was placed, or whether it owes more to some inherent quality which has enabled it to achieve at least a partial triumph over its surroundings. Human civilization certainly appears to have followed the latter course. The manu-

[1] The words *atom* and *proton* are both Greek. They mean *Indivisible* and *First*. Something resembling the atomic theory was propounded by the Roman poet Lucretius in the first century before our era. But it remained a brilliant conjecture until little more than a hundred years ago.

facture of clothes and houses whereby man has enabled himself to withstand the rigours of climate are a simple and obvious illustration. In either case the motive seems to have been the same: namely a desire, on the part of the living organism, to continue to live.

It is doubtful whether any clear distinction can be drawn between the simplest form of animal- and the most highly developed forms of plant-life. It appears to be at least possible that the latter may run into the former so that there is an unbroken chain of connexion not only between man and animals but between a human being and (say) a blade of grass. It may be argued that there is all the difference in the world between an action which is due to conscious purpose, and one which, while externally precisely identical, is caused by unconscious and involuntary reaction to some external stimulus. But in practice it may be difficult to draw the line, and to say positively where the one begins and the other ends.

At present there does appear to be a clear distinction between inanimate matter and matter which is, even to the smallest extent, controlled by any vital principle. But it might be rash to build upon the assumption that it will never be bridged. It may sometimes be convenient to take up a position in a gap, but the situation becomes difficult if a day ever comes when somebody desires to fill up the gap, and proves himself to be capable of doing so.

A notable landmark in the history of biological studies was the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* which appeared as recently as 1859. There he propounded the theory of evolution, which in somewhat modified form is generally accepted now. Naturally the book created a very great stir at the time: partly by reason of the suggestion that men and apes have had a common ancestor, who if we were to meet him to-day would appear to us to be much more like an ape than a man;[1] and partly because his theories could not be reconciled with statements made in the early chapters of *Genesis*. This led to a quarrel between Science

[1] What is known as *The missing link* between the two does not appear to have been discovered yet. The earliest human remains known seem to be more like the human beings of to-day and less like apes than might have been expected. But this is a gap which might be filled at any moment. The possibility that instead of men being superior apes, apes are degenerate men, must perhaps be entertained.

and Religion during which some regrettable things were said by the champions of both parties. The fact that the quarrel arose did not reflect much credit upon the perspicacity of either side. It is now generally recognized that all forms of natural science are concerned with the description of processes. The aims and methods of religion and philosophy are such that the two groups of students are not entitled to trespass upon each other's domain. Religious thinkers owe a great debt to the votaries of Natural Science for the standard of tireless industry and relentless accuracy which they have set, as well as for the immense number of previously unsuspected facts which they have brought to light. And, from the standpoint of their own studies alone, workers in the field of Natural Science have presumably no cause to regret the existence of a body of men who are never likely to believe that everything of which we are, or ever can be, conscious can be satisfactorily explained in the terms of matter and motion.

For example: It is possible to analyse the human frame into its component parts and to say with truth that a man consists of so much lime, so much water, so much phosphorus and so on. It would also be possible to arrange the requisite quantity of each of these ingredients in a row of gallipots upon a table. If, when that had been done, we were to assert that in the gallipots we possessed a man, or that we could produce one by decanting them all into a bath, this conclusion, which might perhaps be defended on 'strictly scientific' grounds, would be disputable from the standpoint of religion or metaphysics. And the interests of truth clearly demand that it should be disputed, if any one were disposed to draw it.

If astronomy, biology, and physics have transformed all our ideas as to the nature and origin of what we see about us, archaeology has affected our beliefs as to the past history of our own race to an almost equally startling extent.

It is not very long since the dates[1] which used to appear at the top of the pages of the Authorized Version were accepted as trustworthy for the events described in the opening chapters of *Genesis*. According to them the Creation of the World took place

[1] They are said to have been the work of Henry Ussher who was Archbishop of Armagh from 1595 to 1613, and to have been reached by adding together the recorded ages of the Patriarchs of the Old Testament.

about four thousand years before the Christian era, so that the human race has been in existence for rather less than six thousand years.

We know now that the inhabitants of the Nile valley and of the plains of Babylonia, besides possibly those of Peru, had reached a fairly advanced degree of civilization more than six thousand years ago, and we have no means of conjecturing how long a period of development may have lain behind that level of attainment. Neither can we say positively that there have not been older civilizations in other parts of the world which have either left no traces, or none which have yet come to light.

The discoveries in Crete which began in the year 1890 have added a lengthy and important chapter to the history of civilization in Europe. The poems of Homer relate to events which may be assigned to the twelfth century before our era, and the state of things which they depict used to be regarded as the dawn of the first civilization which Europe had ever known. We know now that the heroes of Homer lived somewhat after the close of a prolonged period of brilliant culture of which the island of Crete had been the principal focus.

The historical civilization of Greece rose from the ruins of a splendid civilization which had preceded it, much as Saxon England rose from the wreck of Roman Britain.

It is difficult to define *Civilization* with any approach to accuracy or completeness, and impossible to say at exactly what point a race which had been barbarous can begin to be regarded as *Civilized*. But there were people living in the south of France and in the north of Spain who were capable of executing spirited drawings of animals on the walls of the caves which served them for houses at a date which it seems impossible to place later than twenty thousand years before our era. The duration of the human race upon the globe can hardly have been less than 150,000 years, and may have extended over a much longer period.

All these discoveries have given us a new perspective which is bound to affect our views on the subject of religion as well as on many other things. Abraham becomes a very modern personage. The Jewish nation cannot claim any very high antiquity, and Christianity is, as it were, a thing of yesterday. When we recall the numbers and variety of the civilizations which the world has

seen, when we admire the splendour of their achievements as they may be guessed from the fragments which still exist, and reflect upon the completeness with which they have disappeared, we are almost forced to the conclusion that in human history there can be no such thing as finality. Race succeeds race in an unending procession, and while each may make an important contribution to history in its own day, it cannot be within the power of any to leave a lasting mark upon the whole world. The new may be no better than the old, but it is bound at length to oust it from its place. To claim absolute and permanent value for the achievements of any particular race or period is to betray that attitude of mind which is conveniently described as 'provincial'. It means that we have failed to appreciate the true character of the question with which we are concerned, and have exaggerated the importance of the elements in it with which we happen to be familiar.

It may be argued that this new perspective can only affect religion indirectly and that it need not be allowed to affect it at all unless we choose. In fact, this position is becoming steadily less tenable, but there are indications that a great effort to maintain it is not unlikely to be made. There appear to be an increasing number of religious teachers who would reduce faith to mere refusal to listen to anything which might have a disturbing effect upon familiar ideas, and an appeal of this kind will always evoke a certain amount of response. It is unnecessary to dwell upon the fact that such an attitude of mind is in reality the negation of faith and incompatible with any belief in a divine revelation. If God has really revealed anything to man; the value of what He has revealed cannot possibly be impaired by any additions to the sum of our knowledge which He may render possible.

If archaeology and natural science have enlarged our mental horizon in a variety of ways, so that we have now to take account of facts of which former generations knew nothing, there are two other studies of more recent growth which are likely to affect our outlook no less deeply, if in a somewhat different way. I mean first what is known as Comparative Religion, and secondly Psychology.

Christianity was born into a world in which religion was in some respects more in evidence than it is to-day. Temples and shrines of every kind abounded, and the worship of the gods in

whose honour they had been erected was regarded primarily as a matter of public duty. The welfare of the State demanded that it should be carried on, and any one who refused to comply with the public requirements was necessarily regarded as a disloyal citizen. There were also innumerable private, or semi-private, cults, for the most part of oriental origin, which made more effort than did the official religion of the State to satisfy the spiritual needs of the individual and to direct his conduct. The Jews alone stood aloof from this with their uncompromising monotheism and inveterate hatred of anything which could be called idolatry.

The attitude of Christianity towards the religions which it found in possession was not uniform. On the one hand it inherited something of the Jewish tendency to condemn all other systems as an offence in the sight of God, and this feeling was intensified by the moral turpitude of many pagan cults, which was then, as now, unspeakable. S. Paul has drawn a sombre picture of the heathen world in the first chapter of *Romans*, and we know enough from other sources to be able to say that what he has written there is no exaggeration, if not the whole truth.

In some early writers there is also an element of fear, springing from the belief that pagan divinities represented powerful demons, who had a very real existence and would naturally be expected to resent any attempt to challenge their immemorial supremacy.

The irrational and puerile character of some pagan ceremonies, the meaning of which was unknown to the priests responsible for their performance, supplied some Christian controversialists with grounds for ridicule, which was by no means entirely unmerited.

On the other hand, some Christian thinkers were quite ready to recognize elements of truth and nobility in pagan creeds, and while denying that there could be any rival to or substitute for the Gospel, tried to present the Christian revelation as the consummation of what had been dimly and partially perceived before. S. Paul's speech at Athens[1] is an example of this method, and the tradition was continued in the second century in the *Apology* of Aristides[2] and the writings of Clement of Alexandria.[3] Some

[1] See below p. 15.

[2] A defence of Christianity from the philosophic standpoint probably belonging to the earlier years of Antoninus Pius (138–61). It appears to have been intended for the emperor's personal perusal.

[3] See below, p. 15.

modern writers have even endeavoured to show that S. Paul borrowed the sacramental system of the Church, which he grafted successfully on to the teaching of Jesus, from what are called the *Mystery Religions*.

These were the secret and semi-private cults to which reference has been made above. Comparatively little is known about them, because they were secret. But some of them appear to have practised ceremonies which might be considered to present some resemblance to Baptism and the Eucharist. It is unnecessary to discuss the point at length here. There is no evidence that S. Paul owed them anything, even if he knew of their existence.

In the fourth century Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, and paganism sank at once to the position of a beaten enemy. It did not disappear completely, but its claim on the serious attention of Christian thinkers became less. There was less need and less scope for the attitude of Aristides and Clement. If it were worth while to write about paganism at all, it was principally in order to show how complete and merited its overthrow had been. The Emperor Julian (361-3) made an attempt to revive paganism, but his brief effort met with no success.

As pressure from the barbarians increased, Christianity became more and more closely identified with the cause of civilization. The Empire was civilized and Christian. Beyond lay the unknown hordes of destructive barbarians who were frankly pagan, or at best heretical.[1] The destruction of the once-flourishing church of northern Africa by the Vandals in the fifth century tended to sharpen the distinction between the civilized Christian and the heathen savage.

The rapid rise of Islam during the seventh and eight centuries overwhelmed the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, and all but exterminated Christianity in Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, and Egypt. The Christian world became virtually conterminous with western Europe, and was reduced almost to the position of a besieged garrison whose defences might at any moment be carried by assault.[2] The sorties (to pursue the metaphor) which

[1] Some of the Goths were Arians: a heresy which had been formally banished from the Empire at the end of the fourth century.

[2] The Moors were not finally expelled from Spain until 1492, and Turkish armies threatened Vienna in 1683. At the present day Moslem missionaries are active opponents of Christianity in many parts of the world.

aimed at recovering the Holy Places by force of arms met with little success and naturally accentuated the hostility between the Christian and Moslem worlds.

When missionary work, as distinct from the Crusades, became possible again on any considerable scale, it meant that the European sought to propagate his religion amongst the peoples of Asia, Africa, and America. At the same time (roughly, from the sixteenth century onwards) mechanical inventions made Europeans increasingly superior to all their adversaries in battle. The supremacy in war, which has brought the whole of the New World, almost the whole of Africa, and about half of Asia, under the control of Europeans, or at least of men of European descent, was assumed to extend in equal measure to our mental and moral equipment. The Christian missionary could have nothing to learn from those whom he sought to convert. The religious beliefs of the heathen were not considered to be worth serious study. They were meaningless and degrading. It was unnecessary to say more about them than that the heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone, and that if he persisted in these practices the pains of hell would be his portion for ever.

Some Roman Catholic missionaries, especially Jesuits, seem to have been prepared to treat paganism as a stock which might be made capable of bearing Christian fruit. But in the eyes of missionaries of the reformed communions it was something which could not repay cultivation, but must be plucked up by the roots. If this view, which persisted until after the middle of the nineteenth century, is open to criticism, it inspired much heroic effort in the mission-field and achieved some solid results.

Of recent years a not unwholesome change has come over our general attitude. Facilities for travel have brought East and West closer together than they have ever been before and have made sympathetic study of the former by the latter easier. We recognize that the civilizations of India and China are older than our own, and that until they were disturbed by contact with Europe, they displayed a stability which ours cannot rival. And in both those countries civilization appears to owe a larger and more direct debt to religion than amongst ourselves. No one can deny that Christianity has played a very large part in the moulding of

European civilization, but it is a matter of some uncertainty how far our civilization can be regarded as Christian. In some respects it certainly appears to be at variance with Christian principles, and there are probably few people who would refuse to admit that it can only be called Christian in a partial sense and to a limited extent.

It appears probable that criticism of this kind could not be brought against the civilizations of India or China. They appear to be, as a whole, an adequate expression of the religious beliefs of the individual Hindu or Chinaman. They have not been moulded by religion but rest entirely upon it so that in view of their stability there seems to be a *prima facie* case for supposing that the East has religious lessons to impart which it will be well worth the while of the West to learn.

In fact, Eastern religions are receiving a considerable amount of attention. Both Hinduism, or at least a religion based on Hinduism, and Buddhism are said to have an increasing number of disciples both here and in North America, and the maxims of Chinese philosophy are quoted with respect. In the second century it was possible for a Roman poet[1] to describe the medley of religious beliefs to be found at Rome by saying that the Syrian Orontes had long since emptied its waters into the Tiber. We might say now that the Ganges, the Irrawaddy, and the Yellow River have begun to flow into the Thames, and, perhaps even more strongly, into the Hudson River. And the volume of this influx of foreign waters is likely to increase rather than diminish for some time to come.

Only the more highly developed religions which possess a formulated philosophy of their own can be regarded as direct rivals of Christianity. Only they are likely to win the allegiance of men who might otherwise have been Christians. But the study of Comparative Religion embraces much more. Immense pains have been taken to collect all the evidence available with regard to pagan cults of every kind in both ancient and modern times. A vast mass of information has been gathered, and attempts have been made to analyse the motives which prompt actions which at first sight may appear to be entirely irrational.

[1] Juvenal, iii. 62.

It is possible that the intelligence of the civilized student has sometimes tended to read into the religious practices of primitive man more than they really contain. But certain conclusions seem to be justified, and certain beliefs seem to be so widely diffused that it is hardly an exaggeration to describe them as Universal.

Primitive religion appears to possess two *foci*. One is the fear of ghosts,[1] and the other the desire to procure abundant crops. Its practices seem for the most part to aim either at keeping the spirits of the departed from troubling the living, or at causing the earth to bring forth abundantly. Both these desires are readily intelligible, and the methods which are adopted to promote them seem to have been framed by a species of prosaic common sense: or at least by what, given certain premisses, appears to be common sense. One idea which appears to be prevalent in the savage mind is that the best way of causing anything, which cannot be directly controlled, to happen is to imitate it. For example: if water is thrown into the air it will fall back in something closely resembling rain. Therefore by throwing water into the air a genuine fall of rain may be produced. If you desire your corn to grow to a good height it is useful to go into your field when the shoots are beginning to appear above the earth and there to leap into the air as high as you can. These processes are known technically as Sympathetic Magic, and belief in their efficacy accounts for much in primitive religious ceremonial which would otherwise be quite unintelligible.

In the temperate zone the most conspicuous natural phenomenon is the death of vegetation in autumn and its revival in spring. As the earth is considered to be animated by a spirit, without which it could not bring forth and bud, the conclusion is almost inevitably drawn that this spirit, which is naturally an object of worship, dies every year and rises again.

His resurrection is of supreme importance to the community, because if it did not take place all the crops would fail and death by starvation would ensue. It therefore is incumbent upon the community to take such steps as lie in its power to ensure that this disaster shall be averted. The resurrection of the corn-spirit has to be assisted by an imitative performance. Originally, no doubt, some individual was actually put to death and a living

[1] Which perhaps originates in dreams.

substitute, who was identified with him by a process which must be termed 'make-believe', was produced. Gradually this primitive realism was abandoned, except perhaps occasionally in special circumstances, and a symbolic drama took its place. The death of the god was represented in pantomime and he was duly mourned. Then followed his resurrection, which was celebrated with every mark of rejoicing.

Another important element in pagan religion all the world over is the offering of sacrifice. Probably this began as no more than an attempt to induce the god to whom it was offered to be favourable to the worshippers by presenting him with what he might reasonably be expected to like. But loftier conceptions than these were soon attached to the process, if indeed they were not present from the very beginning. What had been offered in sacrifice was consumed by the worshippers, and this act came to be regarded as the real centre of the rite. The meal was shared by the god and his worshippers, and thereby a new, real and intimate bond of union between them was created. Belief in the possibility of some real fellowship between God and man grew up, and this fellowship was created and symbolized by the common meal which both shared.

In course of time there was a further development. The thing offered came to be identified so closely with the Being to whom it was offered that, at least for the immediate purpose in view, it was the equivalent of him. The worshippers fed upon their god in a solemn and sacred meal, and thereby received of his supernatural power as they could not have done through any other channel.

It appears to be doubtful whether this conception could be called Universal. But it was certainly widely diffused. It prevailed, for example, among the Mexicans, and in other places where it cannot be ascribed to Christian influence.

The analogy between these beliefs and those of the Christian Church is superficially too obvious to need elaboration, and it must be admitted that the studies which have brought them to light suggest possibilities of a disturbing character. What if the principal Christian festival (which in England bears the name of a heathen goddess) should prove to be no more than a refined edition of an immemorial nature-myth? When we keep Easter are we really doing no more than celebrating the return of spring,

to which we have attached a religious philosophy of a consolatory and edifying but, unfortunately, fictitious character?

Again: Does the most solemn and sacred act of Christian worship merely represent a survival of primitive and child-like beliefs which cannot stand rational investigation? Civilization may have purged it of its original grossness in practice, but the language of Christian devotion retains a crudity which makes it a legitimate offence to polite ears.

Conclusions such as these have in fact been drawn. We may regard them as superficial and may have adequate reason for dissenting from them. But the fact that they have been drawn can cause us no surprise, and account must be taken of the evidence on which they rest.

It is not unlikely that there will be an increasing tendency in some circles to discount the value of Christianity, and to argue that it is no more than a 'stage in the evolution of religion'. On this theory it may be superior to anything which has gone before it (though even this may be disputed), but there is no reason for regarding it as the final stage, or as the highest which can ever be reached. Rather we may presume that it is nothing of the kind.

This position will be considered further in a later chapter. For the moment it is sufficient to point out that, as in the physical sphere, the word *Evolution* explains nothing. It does not account for the fact that there was in the first instance something which could evolve: nor does it have any bearing on the value of the result which may be reached at any given moment. Deterioration may be evolution no less than the reverse process, so that the highest point in the evolution of religion need not necessarily be still in the future. In artistic power the modern world lags behind ancient Greece, and still more ancient Egypt: and the same might prove to be true of religious insight, and the capacity for constructive religious thought.

It is possible that detailed examination might show that the discrepancies between pagan and Christian beliefs are really wider and more important than the more obvious resemblances between them. Such examination, to be of any value, must be undertaken by men who possess an adequate knowledge of Christian doctrine. And a criticism which may be brought against some writers on Comparative Religion is that this element in their equipment is

lacking. When they refer to Christianity it is sometimes quite obvious that they really know nothing about it, and are at best relying on recollections of what was taught them in their childhood. If Christian scholars are bound to accept what is told them about the practices of other religions, there is no reason why they should respect ill-informed and immature opinions as to the content of their own.

If the parallels between certain pagan and Christian beliefs and practices are in reality as close as is sometimes asserted, this is not in itself any ground for surprise or disquietude.

S. Paul could say to the Athenians: 'Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you. God that made the world . . . hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, . . . that they should seek the Lord if haply they might feel after Him and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us: for in Him we live and move and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring'.[1] He recognized that there are elements of truth and nobility in paganism which are expanded and purified in the Christian revelation.

It is possible to regard all pagan religion as a genuine effort to find God, and therefore to acknowledge gladly any measure of success which it has attained. If we find elsewhere the germ of beliefs which are developed more fully in Christianity there can be no reason for attempting to ignore or belittle them. In fact, their existence leads us to a larger view of God's methods of dealing with men. The preparation of the world for Christ need not be limited to the history of the Jews. The fortunes of the Jewish nation are unique in character and in religious importance, but the operations of God (if we may venture so to term them) were not restricted to a single nation. The whole of human history has been a preparation for the Incarnation of the Son of God.

There have always been scholars who took this view. A notable figure amongst them in early days was Clement, who taught at Alexandria during the years 190–203. But they have never been very many, and circumstances have tended to thrust this conception into the background and to emphasize the sharpness of

[1] *Acts* 17[23-8]. If not an actual report in the modern sense, this undoubtedly represents the apostle's line of argument.

the contrast between Christianity and everything else. The legitimate horror (to which reference has been made above) which the moral depravity of paganism inspired, doubtless contributed a good deal to this. From the standpoint of the practical Christian teacher who, whether in ancient or modern times, has gathered a little flock from paganism and is always confronted with the possibility of relapse, there are obvious advantages in making the gulf as wide as possible.[1]

If it be true to say that Christianity has, as a whole, tended to do less than justice to the spiritual and intellectual content of paganism, Christians ought to be grateful to the modern scholars whose researches are compelling them to take a larger and juster view.

The last modern study which may be considered likely to have an effect on religion is what is known as Psychology. It has not as yet progressed very far, and it would be rash to predict whither it may ultimately lead.

Psychology is concerned with mental processes. It endeavours to ascertain why we think as we do, and to account for the various impulses of which we are conscious, which are not, strictly speaking, entirely rational. It tries to trace all our instincts and fancies, even of the most trivial kind, back to the source from which they spring. The value of some of the 'explanations' which have been advanced may be considered doubtful, but one fact at least appears to have been established.

The whole content of our mind is very much larger than we generally realize. Beside that of which we are conscious there is a vast unexplored tract of our being which is termed The Subconscious Self. Ordinarily it is dormant, so far as our consciousness is concerned, but from time to time (notably in dreams and in delirium) it manifests an activity of which we cannot help being aware. And this activity does not appear to be under the control of our will.

It appears also that the subconscious self never lets go of any impression which it has received. It is a vast storehouse of innumerable memories. Some of these memories are the outcome of our

[1] A legitimate criticism of the methods of the Roman Church is that in its anxiety to procure large numbers of adherents it has compromised too readily with paganism, and still does so in the mission-field.

personal experiences, whether conscious or unconscious: others have been inherited either from our immediate ancestors or from the remote past. Certain irrational impulses, such as fear of the dark, may be derived from impressions received by men of the Stone Age, when it was not unlikely that the dark would screen the approach of some wild beast who regarded man as his natural prey, and possessed the advantage of being able to see his intended victim far more clearly than the victim could hope to see him.

For purposes of illustration the subconscious self may be compared with the geysers which are found in some volcanic regions. Ordinarily they appear to be quiescent, but at intervals they break out into disconcerting and almost devastating activity, and fling a column of boiling water high into the air. After a few minutes they subside again. It is sometimes possible to stimulate this activity by artificial means.

In fact the subconscious self is never at rest, and in the opinion of some psychologists, its activities ultimately determine the whole course of our conduct. It is hard to see how this theory can ever admit of proof, and if we accept it *in toto* it would seem to be difficult to maintain much belief in any moral responsibility on the part of the individual. If we are constrained to think, speak, and act as we do by a force which is not entirely of our own making, of whose nature and extent we can know very little, which is, moreover, *ex hypothesi* almost entirely outside our personal control, it is difficult to see how we can ever be said to deserve either praise or censure to more than a very limited extent.

The psychologist may be in a position to offer to the teacher valuable advice as to the methods which he should adopt. But it is obvious that he may come into direct and violent collision with any one who desires to uphold a definite and immutable moral standard. Disastrous as such a collision would be, it does not exhaust the possible effect of psychological studies upon religious belief.

The beginning and foundation of all religion is the sense of some power other than ourselves and capable of acting independently of us. This sense may be strong or weak. It may rise to the conviction of an Elijah—*As the Lord of hosts liveth before whom I stand*[1]—or it may sink to some nebulous conception of a power

[1] *1 Kings* 18[15].

which upon the whole makes for righteousness. It may be normally present, so that its withdrawal even for a brief interval would occasion a deep sense of loss, or it may be intermittent, recurring at long intervals. It may be associated especially with some particular place or places so that it comes unfailingly whenever we visit them, or it may be entirely independent of all external circumstances. It may be sought deliberately by prayer, meditation, and fasting: or it may come without warning, not in response to any conscious activity on our part.

But wherever it exists, or has ever been, there religion has some place. If there are any who have never known it, it would appear that they can only accept religion, if they accept it at all, at second hand. Their attitude towards religion must resemble that which we take up towards the stories told by travellers of lands which we have never seen. We accept the stories as true, because we have no reason for rejecting them, but we do not know: and while they may arouse our interest they are unlikely to affect us very deeply.

This sense is irrational, inasmuch as we cannot account for it, and could not hope to arrive at it by any logical process. Attention has been directed to it recently by a German writer, Dr. Otto, in a book called *Das Heilige*, which has been translated into English under the title *The Idea of the Holy*.

Dr. Otto thinks that its reality and importance have been unduly neglected, and he has labelled it *The Numinous Sense*.[1]

The importance of this sense for religion can hardly be disputed, but it is not unlikely that psychologists will be disposed to question its reality. They will not deny that it is actually experienced, but they may deny that what is experienced corresponds with any reality outside ourselves. It is merely an outbreak from the subconscious self which has forced its way into the field of our consciousness. On this theory when we believe that we commune with God, when we imagine that we have some consciousness of His presence, we are, in fact, communing only with the unexplored depths of our own being. What we have taken for religious awe

[1] The adjective *numinous* has been coined by Dr. Otto from the Latin word *Numen* which may be translated *Godhead*. Numen is the most general word for what may be called Divinity in the abstract: i.e. for a being who is to be regarded as not of this world, but about whom nothing more definite than this other-wordly existence has been predicated.

is no more than irrational fear, prompted by dim racial memories derived from a remote and hazardous past. We are, in fact, in the position of a savage who encounters his own reflection in a mirror and, failing to recognize it, imagines that he is face to face with another person. It will probably be impossible for the psychologist to produce anything resembling a proof of his theory, and perhaps equally impossible for those who disagree with him to prove him to be mistaken, but it is obvious that the effect of such views upon religious belief and practice may be considerable.

Admittedly, the danger of unconscious self-deception can never be very far away when we believe that we are communing with God. Prayer, even if no doubts are entertained as to its validity or as to the reality of the God to whom it is addressed, may always degenerate into what is called 'auto-suggestion'. These risks must be run if we propose to have anything to do with religion. They are probably more acute now than they have ever been before, because the tendency of our time seems to be to rely more and more upon religious experience: which, in practice, means virtually the feelings of which we are conscious at some selected moment. If we propose to base our religious belief primarily upon our feelings we shall desire to have feelings of the kind which can be utilized for this purpose. If they are not forthcoming the temptation to try to manufacture them may become strong, and there is abundance of religious literature to show us what feelings other people have had and so to supply us with a model for our own.

The modern emphasis on Experience in matters of religion is inspired by a praiseworthy desire for sincerity. It may conduce to sincerity, and undoubtedly often does. On the other hand, it may lead to very different results. Just in so far as we make use of the argument from Experience (and there can be no question but that we are justified in making some use of it), we must recognize that we have elected to walk by a very narrow and slippery path. It may, if we can hold to it, lead us higher than any other which we could have chosen, but we are bound to recognize that it is beset with dangers.

It is unfortunate that writers on religious psychology seem, for the most part, to confine themselves to the study of abnormal examples.[1] These are, no doubt, more conspicuous and, from the

[1] e. g. William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

student's point of view, more interesting than the normal ones. But for the purpose of religion they are less important, partly because they constitute a small minority of the total, and partly because Christianity is concerned primarily with the normal healthy and, if we like to say so, commonplace man. Any interest which attaches to the vagaries of the abnormal minority is purely academic. If we limit ourselves to the study of the abnormal in religion, or even if we regard it as the most important element, our conclusions are likely to be of no more value than political and social theories based exclusively or primarily on observations conducted within the walls of a lunatic asylum.

The best test which can be applied to any religious experience is—*By their fruits ye shall know them.* It has been said that the saints are wonderfully unanimous, and this is as true of their character as of the actual things which they say. They do not present any monotonous uniformity, like that of a number of objects which have been cut to the same pattern, but underneath their unending variety certain elements of character can be discerned. These are remarkably constant and stable, and have always commanded a degree of admiration directly proportioned to the thoroughness with which they have been understood. The most legitimate criticism which can be brought against the Church as a whole is that it has never produced as many saints as it ought to have done. If it could produce more, no one doubts that the world would be a better place to live in.

It is difficult to believe that the saintly character springs from delusion. While proof is impossible, common sense constrains us to admit that those who have displayed it in the most perfect form have always been, as they themselves have believed, in contact with some reality. The contrary opinion creates more, and more formidable, difficulties than it solves.

From whatever standpoint we regard the world in which we live it is an entirely different place from what it was even a century ago. And there is no indication that the changes in thought and feeling which have been caused by the expansion of knowledge in every direction have reached or are nearing their term. We might say with the ancient philosopher[1]—in a slightly different sense, but with at least equal justice—*Everything is in a state of*

[1] Heraclitus of Ephesus, *c.* 535–475 B.C.

flux. There is only one thing which antedates all these changes and even professes to be unaffected by them, and that is the Christian Church. It was born into a world in which no one had dreamed of the existence of innumerable facts which are now unquestioned and can be found in any elementary text-book. The lines of its organization, which are still jealously preserved throughout the greater part of the Christian world, had been laid before the Roman Empire had begun to decline. A large part of its literature, and the most important part, is written in languages which have long since ceased to be spoken as a mother-tongue, and are not studied now as widely as they used to be. Yet the Church not only lays claim to the right to continue to exist, it asserts boldly that the religion which its institutions have been framed to preserve and propagate is of universal application and absolute value, and ought to be the inspiration and guide of all public and private conduct in every corner of the globe. It further maintains that it alone is in a position to speak the truth as to the nature of man, his relation to God, and his final destiny.

It is not unreasonable to ask whether these magnificent claims can be maintained. They were first made and admitted in what was in every sense a smaller world where men were less conscious of their own limitations: and it is a common experience that a local reputation fails to stand the test of a wider arena. Christianity has undoubtedly rendered immense services to European civilization in the past: but so in its day did the Roman Empire. We are bound to face the question whether its day is not now done, or at least whether its sun has not begun to set. Can Christianity survive as a real power in the new and changing world in which we live? Or must it share the fate of the Schools of Athens, which after a thousand years of unrivalled intellectual primacy were closed by Justinian because they had no longer anything to say which the world had any desire to learn?

II. CHRISTIANITY AND FACT

IF we are compelled to ask—Can Christianity survive as an effective force in a world which has become entirely different from the world into which it was born? it is obvious that a necessary preliminary to arriving at any answer is to try to determine what manner of thing we conceive Christianity to be. What is the real nature of the religion whose very existence may seem to be imperilled by the changes in thought and feeling which the expansion of knowledge has forced upon us?

To some minds Christianity presents itself as identical with the ecclesiastical institutions in which it has been embodied, so that its survival is indissolubly linked with their continuance. There is undoubtedly some justification for this view. It is certainly not easy to see how anything can survive, except perhaps as a matter of purely academic interest to a very small circle of students, unless it is embodied in institutions of some kind;[1] and it is undoubtedly true that ecclesiastical institutions have displayed a vitality and adaptability to which it would be difficult to find a parallel anywhere. They have lasted longer than any other institutions in Europe, and have surmounted crises which appeared to have made their dissolution inevitable. But in spite of that it might be rash to say that they are indestructible. If we say that they are, we must assume that they possess some peculiar quality which has never been shared by any other institutions which the world has ever seen, and to do this at the outset would amount to a *petitio principii*.

To others Christianity presents itself as primarily a philosophical system or a code of morals; or possibly as a combination of the two. If it can be reduced to either of these things it is hard to see how really permanent value can be claimed for it. A system of philosophy must become liable to modification when facts which were not within the knowledge of the author come to light, and

[1] e.g. the idea of freedom would not survive for very long unless embodied in a legal code of some kind which furnished some effective machinery for the administration of justice. The disappearance of law in any community would very soon be followed by the disappearance of freedom.

this process is likely to continue until the original system has been completely superseded. It may survive as an interesting example of pioneer work, and may be able to contribute something of real value to its successor. But it cannot be the last word.

A moral code which makes any attempt to be comprehensive, and goes beyond the enunciation of a few simple principles, must be closely related to the actual circumstances of the people who are intended to live by it. Otherwise it cannot be an effective practical guide. As these alter, portions of the code will become obsolete and portions will be found inadequate, so that here too a continual process of modification and expansion will be required. All systems of ecclesiastical and civil law have always found this out by experience.

Undoubtedly there is a Christian philosophy as there is a Christian moral code,[1] but it is unnecessary to try to maintain that either of them have yet reached their final form. They are products of the religion—it might be fair to speak of them as no more than by-products—rather than the essence of the religion itself. If any particular system of Christian philosophy becomes discredited;[2] or if what have been accepted as Christian moral principles prove to need revision[3] and expansion, this does not mean that Christianity itself has suffered with them. It might even be construed as a mark of the vitality of Christian belief if forms of expression which were regarded as adequate in the past have from time to time to be discarded in favour of better ones. There will, however, probably always be some to whom it will appear that any change in method of expression necessarily involves a fundamental change in what is being expressed.

Christianity is primarily a particular attitude towards life as a whole. This attitude is partly intellectual, inasmuch as it consists in belief that certain statements which can be made are true, and partly moral, as it consists in compelling ourselves to adopt a course of action which is invariably difficult and seldom to our

[1] See further Chapter VII.

[2] e.g. the doctrine of transubstantiation rests upon a particular philosophy of accidents and substance which is not accepted now. Other defence for the Eucharistic doctrine which it aimed at preserving must be found.

[3] e.g. for more than four centuries no Christian saw any moral reason why he should not possess slaves. It did not occur to any one that the relation between master and slave is incompatible with the position of both as children of one heavenly Father.

obvious or immediate advantage. This attitude finds its justification only and entirely in certain historical facts, and can neither be understood nor criticized fairly apart from them.

The Christian view of life does not try to commend itself as intrinsically and in the abstract the most probable and reasonable which the mind of man can conceive. If it did, it is hard to see why it should ever succeed in gaining a single rational adherent. It confronts the world with a message which may be roughly summed up in a single sentence—*God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.*[1] This message naturally calls for a good deal in the way of commentary and elucidation. It might be rash to say that we have yet grasped its full meaning, or that we perceive the full nature of the effect which it ought to exercise upon our daily conduct. But any fresh contributions which may be made to its elucidation, whether from the standpoint of philosophy or of ethics, do not affect the character and source of the message itself. This message rests entirely upon the belief that at a certain definite time and place certain definite things did happen. Otherwise it could not exist: or if it did it would be really impossible to attach to it any definite meaning of any kind whatever.

It is not the primary function of Christianity to 'explore avenues', formulate theories, or even to suggest schemes for promoting the general welfare of mankind, but to declare that certain things have actually happened, and that because these things did happen, and for no other reason whatsoever, certain views about the nature of God, the nature of man, and the relation between God and man are true, and that all other views which have been or may be advanced on these subjects are untrue.

There is therefore necessarily an authoritative note in Christian teaching. This is widely resented to-day: largely because the reason for it is not understood.

It is impossible to read the discussions of religion which may be found in the pages of popular novelists, and appear from time to time in the columns of the daily press, without noticing that the underlying assumption (whether tacit or expressed) is that all religion is necessarily a matter of speculative opinion. The individual is accordingly entitled to make his own selection from any system or systems which may be presented to him. He can ap-

[1] *1 John* 5[11].

propriate what commends itself to him, and reject, usually without examination, whatever does not. Every one, it is assumed, is adequately equipped by nature for this undertaking: and the historic foundation of Christianity is quietly ignored.

This attitude of mind may be attributed in part to the tendency to lay more and more stress upon Experience in matters of religion. This is prompted by a praiseworthy desire for sincerity, but the fact is sometimes overlooked that this Experience is no more than the personal experience of the individual. This is of limited extent, and the personal experience of other individuals, which may have led them to somewhat different conclusions, may at least be worth taking into account.

As soon as we begin to take account of the recorded experience of other people we have admitted the principle of Authority into our thought. Authority has a bad name in our world, partly because it has sometimes been associated in the past with attempts to repress by force legitimate aspirations (which merely means it may have been exercised unwisely by those in whose hands it happened to be deposited), and partly because war is the dissolution of all ordinary authority. A generation which has had first-hand experience of war upon a large scale is likely to sit loosely to the claims of authority of every kind.

In religion a sharp antithesis is often postulated between Authority and Experience. The former is considered to promote formalism and hypocrisy: the latter to be the only road to sincerity. There is undoubtedly some justification for this view, though it must be remembered that Experience may evaporate into no more than very unstable sentiment. But the antithesis is in reality fallacious, as it ignores the fact that Authority rests upon the Experience of the past. It is the only method by which that experience can be preserved intact and transmitted for the use of succeeding generations.

The first Christians are credited with having undergone personal experiences of a very remarkable character which *ex hypothesi* have never been and can never be repeated. No succeeding generation can profess to have shared them, from which it follows that the record of them must be of unique importance and of permanent value.

The Christian religion is bound to lay special emphasis upon the

historical events which gave it birth: in other words to proclaim them in authoritative fashion. It may also maintain that they cannot be ignored, or relegated to any secondary position. Any criticism of Christianity which attempts to do this is really valueless. Christianity can only be impugned on the ground that the reputed events did not in fact take place, so that the historical foundation which it claims does not in reality exist. As this is manifestly incapable of proof, the possibility (to say the least) that they did take place must be faced, and allowance must be made for them in our religious thought. Otherwise we are in the position of a watchman who should declare confidently that there was nothing in sight when he had surveyed only a portion of the horizon.

The idea that religion rests ultimately upon individual opinion only is probably stronger in the English-speaking parts of the world than anywhere else. This is partly due to the fact that we have long enjoyed a very large measure of religious toleration, which no one has the least desire to curtail. In our eyes it is an axiom that nobody ought to be penalized for his religious beliefs, unless they are such that they tend to subvert all morality and constitute an offence against public decency, or bring him into collision with the laws of the land. In practice this very seldom happens. When it does occur the individual against whom proceedings have to be taken is probably unfit, either on mental or moral grounds, for the enjoyment of freedom. It is desirable in the public interest to consign him either to a lunatic asylum or to prison, not exactly for his religious opinions, but because his religious opinions indicate that he is on general grounds unfit to be at large.

Another contributory cause is to be found in the divisions of Christendom. The Christian world is in fact divided into a number of camps which if not exactly hostile are not on terms of complete intimacy with each other. And the occupants of each camp are apt to consider that every one else ought to come over to them: or at least that they possess the truth in larger measure than any other.

Each camp can defend itself with vigour and at least a fair show of reason, and has some peculiar achievement to its credit. It would not be true to say that these divisions are not both wide and

deep, or that they are only concerned with matters which can be regarded as details, such as the clothes to be worn by the clergy or the ornamentation of churches. And it is therefore not unnatural if many people despair of arriving at anything which can be called Truth, and come to the conclusion (which is in many respects a convenient one) that religion is after all a matter of taste and temperament, so that the individual will do best to follow his own inclination.

One modern novelist makes one of his characters (a successful playwright) say: 'Religion isn't realistic: it never was realistic. Religion is the entertainment of man's spirituality just as the romantic drama is the entertainment of his mentality.'[1]

It may be presumed that he considers this to be at least a reasonable point of view: and it is not unlikely that it has commanded the admiration of many of his readers.

The differences between the various sections of the Christian world are wide and deep, but there is no disagreement as to the outstanding facts upon which the Christian religion rests. There is no Christian community, probably in fact no community which would wish to claim the title *Christian* for itself, which doubts that Jesus Christ was an historical Personage who was crucified at the instigation of the Jews during the reign of Tiberius: that He rose from the dead and is now at the centre of the spiritual order. This last fact can only be expressed in the language of metaphor by saying that *He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God.* To this may be added the conviction that these events have made the world potentially, and to a limited extent actually, an entirely different place.

It is not until further questions begin to be asked, especially as to the methods by which the effect of these past events is to be made operative in the life of the community or of the individual to-day, that divergences begin to appear. No Christian can be required to defend, or even to discuss, his religion on any other assumption than that it is founded upon certain historical events, the occurrence of which is sufficiently well-attested[2] not to be legitimately a matter of mere opinion. It can only be criticized by those who have learned the science of weighing historical evidence,

[1] *Poor Relations*, by C. Mackenzie, p. 67.
[2] See below, pp. 41 ff. and Chapters III, IV.

and are thoroughly familiar with the evidence available in this instance.

This emphasis upon historic facts distinguishes Christianity very sharply from a system of philosophy or a code of ethics. As has been said above, Christianity includes both these things but differs essentially from either. It also differs essentially from all other religions except that of the Jews from which it sprung.[1] The Jewish religion is also rooted and grounded in history. It is what it is because Abram left Ur of the Chaldees and Jacob and his sons went down into Egypt. Moses led their descendants thence, and the Promised Land was conquered. After a brief period of prosperity, which has perhaps been somewhat exaggerated, disaster came upon the Jewish state, culminating in the capture of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans early in the sixth century before our era. The inhabitants were deported to Babylonia, but some seventy years later Cyrus the Persian allowed a remnant to return and rebuild their national life. This continued, despite an attempt to suppress it by Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century before our era, until the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the year A.D. 70.[2]

It is quite impossible to divorce the Jewish religion from these events, and unlikely that any Jew would wish to do so. It could not have arisen without them, and is what it is because they took place. The fact that it survives in the world to-day is no doubt largely due to the solidity of its historical foundation.

The contrast between a religion which is founded on history and one which is not can be seen by comparing Christianity with what is perhaps its only religious rival in the world to-day, namely Buddhism. The Buddhist religion originated in the north of India probably during the sixth century before our era. The name of the founder is given variously as Sidartha, Sakya-Mouni, or Gautama. The word *Buddha* is said to be a title and to signify *The Enlightened One*. He is said to have been of royal blood, and

[1] Islam possesses a certain amount of historical foundation. But it could not have existed if both Judaism and Christianity had not preceded it.

[2] There were two subsequent rebellions of the Jews against the Romans, in 116 and 131. Both were unsuccessful, and the latter finally extinguished any hope of regaining national independence which the Jews may have entertained. Since then they have acquiesced in a *status* of political dependence.

to have been brought up in all the luxury which belonged to his station. One day, when he was in early manhood, he was driving in his chariot and his eye fell upon a corpse putrefying by the roadside. Up to that time he had never been allowed to see anything of an unpleasant nature, and this spectacle seems to have made a profound impression on his mind. He abandoned the duties of his station, and his wife and child, in order to lead a life of religious contemplation with a view to discovering a remedy for the manifest evils of existence. Eventually he came to the conclusion that the root of all evil is desire. Every motion of the will is necessarily and inherently sinful, and can only lead to increasing misery. The way of escape is for man to free himself from all earthly entanglements, not merely by leading an ascetic life, but by setting himself to master all desire: in other words, by annihilating his will. One lifetime will not suffice for this, but after a number of re-births it may be accomplished. The soul will then be finally freed from the miseries of this world and will be absorbed into Nirvana: which appears to be roughly equivalent to non-existence. It will become as a drop of water when it re-enters the ocean.

The spot on which these convictions took definite shape in his mind and the scene of his death are, I believe, both shown: and there appears to be no reason why they should not be authentic.

The early Buddhists were enthusiastic missionaries and their religion spread with great rapidity. It conquered the greater part of India, the whole of Ceylon, Burma, Siam, and Tibet, and penetrated deeply into China and Japan. It has converted Tibet into an ecclesiastical principality roughly analogous with what the States of the Church were before the abolition of the temporal power of the Papacy in 1870, though here its ascendency has been purchased by admitting a large element of primitive animism entirely alien from its true character. At the present day it appears to have little hold on India, China, and Japan, but it is possible that its adherents still outnumber Christians, and the name of the great Buddhist emperor Asoka[1] is perhaps more widely known than that of Christ.

[1] He reigned in the second century of our era and his empire included the whole of India except the extreme south. He appears to have been a most wise and enlightened monarch and to have done his utmost to

Although Buddhism is the lowest depth of atheistic pessimism, inasmuch as it knows nothing of any God and despairs entirely of this world, it has been, and still is, a real religious force. Its influence is entirely on the side of peace and humanity, and its doctrine of self-renunciation is said to be capable of producing a very beautiful type of character. A possible criticism is that it is at bottom selfish,[1] as its avowed goal is the escape of the individual from the miseries of existence. It does, however, represent an honest attempt to deal thoroughly with the question of Sin. It does not dismiss Sin as something negligible, nor try to reduce it to ceremonial defilement which calls for nothing more than ceremonial remedies.

No one doubts that the Buddha was an historical person, or that he really held the views which have been ascribed to him. We need not attempt to deny that he was a very remarkable person. But this does not make Buddhism an historical religion in the sense in which that title may be claimed either for Christianity or for Judaism. Buddhism does not rest on what the Buddha was, or even on what he did, but on what he thought. It does not appeal to any particular historical events and say that it is what it is because they happened. The only event which has any special significance for its origin is the fact that the sight of a corpse by the roadside turned the young prince's mind into a new channel. A certain measure of psychological interest may attach to this, but there is nothing very remarkable about the actual event. Immense numbers of people have undergone a similar experience, though it has not affected them in the same way nor to the same extent. The Buddha never had before him, and did not lay before his disciples, any facts which were not already common property. He contemplated the world about him and drew certain conclusions from what he saw. Any one who chooses can do the same for himself. There are no particular facts which must be known and weighed before the value of the conclusions reached by the Buddha can be discussed.

govern his immense dominions in accordance with the highest principles of his religion.

[1] A similar criticism is sometimes brought against Christianity on the ground that it is an appeal to the individual to save his own soul. This is, however, based on misunderstanding, and ignores the place assigned by the Gospel to unselfish service.

The foundation of Christianity is entirely different. Christianity is not a system of speculation but a philosophy of history. In a sense all history is relevant to it, but it lays particular stress on certain events which are admittedly of unique character, and maintains that its claims cannot be considered without reference to them. Speaking roughly, if the facts are admitted, the Christian position is in broad outline impregnable. It can only be overthrown if it should appear that the facts are not facts; that is to say, if the outstanding events to which Christianity appeals did not take place as it believes them to have done.

No attempt has yet been made to admit the facts but to place some entirely different interpretation upon them, and it is really impossible that this should be done with any show of reason. If any one believes that Jesus of Nazareth was a real person, of whom we possess an even moderately trustworthy account, who was crucified, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven, he cannot challenge the Christian position as a whole, however profoundly he may distrust or dislike the subsequent development of any part of the Christian Church. It would be easier, if hardly less illogical, to accept a large amount of Christian teaching as valuable while disputing the historical character of the events which gave the Church birth. This has, in fact, been attempted more than once by men of high character, whose admiration for the fruits of an enlightened, disciplined, and sensitive conscience has been accompanied by inability to recognize that a conscience of this order is a product of Christian belief. This attitude of mind is still to be met with, though it is probably less common than it was half a century ago.

The emphasis which Christianity lays upon historic fact brings certain advantages and drawbacks in its train.

It undoubtedly helped the new religion to conquer some of its early rivals in the Roman Empire;[1] and will always provide a

[1] One of the most formidable of these was Mithraism, a form of sun-worship which originated in Persia. It became extremely popular in the Roman Empire, especially amongst the army. Its teaching appears to have been remarkably pure and lofty, and it possessed a sacramental system which challenged comparison with that of Christianity. But the central figure, Mithras, was a personification of the sun, and every one knew that he had never really existed or performed any of the acts ascribed to him.

valuable *point d'appui* for those whose minds do not turn naturally in the direction of speculative philosophy. It is difficult to see how a religion which did not declare—*This really happened*—could ever gain any very large number of adherents in Europe. The Oriental mind appears to have less sense or appreciation of fact, so that a large measure of success might be possible for a purely speculative system in Asia. Both Buddhism and Hinduism appear to illustrate this.

This prosaic strain in Christianity has done much to invest it with real ethical force and to make it something by which ordinary men and women can order their lives, instead of nothing more than an interesting topic for discussion in refined and leisurely circles.

It has also enabled it to resist with a very considerable measure of success well-meant attempts to graft upon it speculations which are in reality entirely alien from its true character.[1] This intractability is a continual source of annoyance to certain people, but it is a necessary consequence of the appeal to historic fact. If it has on some occasions led to intellectual narrowness it has guaranteed continuance.

Christian belief may be compared with a stream which rises at a definite place. Its sources have been kept clear and its banks have been carefully maintained by an active body of conservators. If they have made the channel narrower than they need have done, they have at least preserved a steady flow of water, and have prevented what might have been a real benefit to mankind from being squandered in an unsavoury swamp.[2]

On the other hand, the appeal to historic fact gives rise to certain difficulties. If we maintain that any particular events are of supreme and permanent importance to the entire human race, it follows that they must be facts of a unique character. Nothing really comparable with them can have occurred anywhere else, or can be expected to do so at any future time. The particular events upon which Christianity principally relies are now ancient history, and the question is bound to be raised—the individual

[1] See below, Chapter V.

[2] It would be out of place to attempt to discuss here the number or nature of the tributaries which the Christian river may have received during its course, or be destined to receive in the future. It is not intended to imply that there have been none.

is almost compelled to raise it for his own satisfaction—What are our grounds for believing that these astonishing events did in reality take place? In view of their character and importance, is the evidence for them really sufficient, or have we built an elaborate structure upon a foundation too slight to support it? No one can deny that these are perfectly reasonable and legitimate queries to which the Church must be prepared to return some rational reply.

It is hardly possible that any historical event should admit of absolute proof when it has once passed beyond living memory. As long as there is any one left who can say, I know this happened because I was there and saw it with my own eyes, there may be no room for doubt. But as soon as testimony of this kind has ceased there must always be a margin of uncertainty. It may be large or small, but it must exist. It is never possible to do more than show that it is much more reasonable to believe that an event took place than that it did not. When we are dealing with religion we ought not to desire more. If absolute certainty, comparable with the certainty with which we assert that, despite appearance to the contrary, the earth travels round the sun, were attainable there would be no place left for faith or courage. These qualities only become possible when we are asked to stake a great deal upon something which may conceivably turn out to be untrue. We should certainly be immeasurably the poorer if these qualities were not demanded of us by our religion. It is, in fact, not easy to see how a system of belief which did not demand them could really deserve to be called Religion. Religion must involve taking risks of various kinds in various ways. If we are not prepared to do this we had better leave it alone.

Historical evidence is of two kinds, Traditional and Documentary. First there is the general belief that a given event (e.g. the Norman Conquest) did take place, and secondly there are, or may be, written records which profess to give a trustworthy account of it.

In each instance the character of the evidence available has to be examined with scrupulous care. First the antiquity of the tradition has to be considered. Does it appear to have originated at the time when the event, if it be an event, must be assumed to have taken place, or is it impossible to trace it beyond a consider-

ably later date? Can we discern any reason which might have led anybody to invent such a story, and to endeavour to get it accepted as historic truth? Secondly—What can be ascertained about the available documents? Are they the work of eyewitnesses, or are they sufficiently close in date to the events with which they deal to make it possible for them to rest upon the testimony of eyewitnesses? If they are of later date, can anything be discovered as to the sources of information upon which the authors may have relied?

All these are questions for the critical historian, and historical science has developed enormously in very recent times. Laborious research in libraries, and systematic excavation of ancient sites, have increased the amount of material available, and the method of handling it has become much more scientific. Accuracy has become the goal of the historian, to the exclusion of every other consideration. His one aim is to ascertain as nearly as may be what did actually happen, and then to record the result of his researches in the simplest and most impersonal fashion possible. He is not concerned with the production of an interesting story, or with the making out of a case of any kind, but solely with the discovery of the truth. His conclusions are not always necessarily infallible because they must owe something to his individual judgement. But we may fairly say that our generation is better equipped for estimating the value of what purports to be historical evidence than any of its predecessors have ever been. The last fifty years have brought a great change in our attitude towards tradition, largely because certain traditions which had been dismissed as of no historical value have been remarkably confirmed by archaeological discovery. The best-known instance of this is the story of the Trojan war.

The Greeks believed that at a very early period of their history their half-mythical chieftains, who were to them much what the patriarchs of the Old Testament are to us, had united to attack a city at the entrance of the narrow strait which separates Europe from Asia and is known in modern times as the Dardanelles. The siege was prolonged, but eventually the Greeks were successful and Troy was taken and burnt. The Homeric poems are the earliest documents which refer to these events. In their present form they appear to have undergone a good deal of editing, and

cannot be regarded as even approximately contemporary with the events which they describe.

At one time the entire story was dismissed as myth which, as far as it could be said to have any real meaning at all, was concerned with the movements of the heavenly bodies. None of the actors were real people, and no such war had ever been fought.

A succession of remarkable discoveries, both on the soil of Greece and on the reputed site of Troy, have left no room for doubt that the war did take place, and that Troy was taken and burnt early in the twelfth century before our era. The traditional cause of the war[1] and many details in the story which has come down to us may be imaginary; but there is no question now that the war itself is an historical event. If it were not it is difficult to see any reason why the story should have been invented.

With this we may contrast the story of King Arthur.

If he was a real person he must have flourished prior to the landing of S. Augustine in 597. But the first known mention of him is in the *Historia Brittonum* of Nennius which was written about the year 800. The version of the story which became immensely popular was the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth, who wrote a book called *Historia Regum Brittaniae* between the years 1139–1148. He professed to be translating from a very ancient book which had been brought from Armorica (Brittany) by Walter Archdeacon of Oxford. Nothing more is known of this work. In the year 1191 what were considered to be the bones of Arthur and his queen Guinevere were discovered at Glastonbury, but there is no reason for believing that they were genuine.

Here we have an example of a tradition which is now generally discredited. It rests on very flimsy evidence, and it is not difficult to discern reasons for its manufacture, including the story of the discovery of the bones. No sober historian would attach much, if any, weight to it now. But, speaking generally, modern research has shown that as a rule tradition is to be taken seriously. It is probably inaccurate in respect of details; for them we must look rather to documents, if there are any available, but in broad

[1] Paris, son of Priam, King of Troy, was said to have carried off Helen, wife of Menelaus, King of Sparta, and the war was waged to recover her. It is probable that tolls exacted by the Trojans from ships which wished to enter the Black Sea had more to do with it.

general outline the presumption is that tradition is trustworthy unless proof to the contrary is forthcoming.

As soon as we turn our attention to Christianity we are confronted by the Christian tradition. It differs from many other ancient traditions in that it is still active. It is not merely a memory, but is embodied in the actual practices of a society which has had an unbroken existence from the period at which the Christian events are believed to have taken place. The society has undergone various vicissitudes in the course of centuries, and and its externals differ very widely in different parts of the world. But no one can deny that it has had a continuous history, and that it has always believed that one of its most important functions was to preserve the tradition which it had received.[1] The Christian Church as a whole has never been brought to an end and re-started on a different basis. There is nothing in its history analogous with the gap which separates Saxon England from Roman Britain. Circumstances have tended to obscure the significance of this, because in practice the word *Tradition* has been used to justify a very wide variety of ecclesiastical practices of very varying degrees of importance. People who believe that one form of words and one only can ever be used to express any Christian truth, or consider it important that the clergy should dress in one particular way, have generally appealed to tradition to find support for their views. Any one whose conservative instincts tend to make him dislike change, or whose antiquarian tastes lead him to desire to perpetuate as much as possible of what belongs to former ages, has naturally found that his best prospect of getting what he likes is to appeal to the tradition of the Church.

Admittedly the tradition of the Church is important, even as regards secondary matters, and the appeal to it is, within limits, legitimate. But during the later Middle Ages it came to be used primarily as a method of defending beliefs and practices whose value was, to say the least, questionable. Many of them had grown up during what are sometimes called the Dark Ages, when the collapse of the Roman Empire submerged Europe in a flood of savagery and ignorance. The revival of learning subjected

[1] All attempts at reform within the Church have avowedly aimed at restoring the Christian tradition to its primitive purity by divesting it of later accretions, and at preserving it more faithfully in future.

these beliefs and practices to searching criticism, which in its turn led to the ecclesiastical struggles of the sixteenth century. The point at issue in these disputes was very largely the claim of tradition. What really is the tradition of the Church? How much does it really include? To what extent may it be legitimate to disregard it in any respect? These were the questions which were debated by the reforming parties in England and on the Continent, and somewhat different answers were returned to them in different places. Speaking roughly, all reformed Churches have restricted the scope of tradition, and have relegated it to a position of secondary importance. Their supreme authority and final court of appeal is the written word of the New Testament. If tradition conflicts with this, tradition must give way.

This position is not quite so simple as those who first adopted it probably imagined. It is, in fact, beset with difficulties, owing to divergence of opinion as to what certain passages in the New Testament must be understood to mean. The final court of appeal for the reformed Churches does not always speak as clearly as could be desired.

The Church of Rome has taken a different line. It avowedly places more reliance in tradition, and appears to regard the authority of tradition as at least equivalent to that of Scripture.[1] For purposes of administration this is obviously convenient, as it enables authority to place any existing belief or practice outside the sphere of discussion. In the opinion of everybody outside the Roman Church it becomes an illegitimate method of sanctioning venerable abuses.

The Church of England, though the most conservative of all reformed Churches, did come down quite definitely upon the reforming side. Accordingly, in the eyes of most Englishmen, the appeal to tradition is regarded, to say the least, with considerable suspicion. It appears to represent the war-cry of a party which his own Church has quite definitely disowned, and to amount to nothing but an appeal to inert conservatism of the most unintelligent type.

[1] 'Perspiciens hanc veritatem et disciplinam contineri in libris scriptis et sine scripto traditionibus, quae ipsius Christi ore ab apostolis acceptae aut ab ipsis apostolis . . . ad nos usque pervenerunt.' (Council of Trent, Decretum de canonicis Scripturis, Session 4, 8 April 1546.)

For this view there is a certain amount of justification. But if we consider ourselves entitled to deal freely with tradition in many respects, this claim to reasonable liberty must not be allowed to obscure the importance of what may be called the fundamental Christian tradition as a whole.

There are two things upon which all Christians are and always have been agreed, however widely they may differ in other respects. These are the Commemoration of the Lord's Supper, and the observance of the first day in each week as a holy day.[1]

The Christian system cannot be divorced from these two practices. Indeed it could not exist as anything more than a nebulous sentiment apart from them. A community which disregarded them would probably not wish to be reckoned as part of the Christian Church. If it did, its claim would certainly be disallowed by everybody else. The lives of its members might reach a high ethical standard, and its principles of conduct might owe something to the teaching of the Gospel. But it would not be a Christian society in any intelligible sense, any more than the fact that a species of English is spoken in the United States of North America, and that American institutions owe something to our own, constitutes citizens of that republic members of the British Empire.

It is impossible to argue that these two practices are an intrusion into a system which originally knew nothing of them. There is no evidence that there has ever been anybody who called himself by Christ's name in whose eyes they have ever been in any sense an innovation and no part of what he understood himself to have accepted when he made his original profession.

It is true that a large body of doctrinal belief has gathered round the Lord's Supper, and that this is by no means uniform throughout the Christian world. There are some who believe that at this point Christian teaching has borrowed illegitimately from pagan sources. But it is admitted that such borrowing must have taken place so early that it is commonly ascribed to S. Paul. The clear and emphatic distinction which he draws between the cup

[1] It is possible that Baptism ought to be added to these. But the fact that it was practised by John the Baptist makes it not distinctively Christian in origin. Some sort of ceremonial washing is so obvious as a means of admitting converts to a religious organization that it would not be surprising to find that many religious teachers had adopted it.

and table of the Lord and the cup and table of devils[1] appears to make this improbable. It certainly suggests that he was aware of possible analogies between pagan rites and the Christian ordinance, and considered that in reality they had and could have nothing in common. It is especially significant that this passage occurs in a letter whose genuineness is not in dispute. No one doubts that the epistles to the Corinthians are the work of S. Paul, and if there had been any fusion of Christian and pagan ideas in early times Corinth is the place where we should naturally expect it to have taken place. A seaport is necessarily a rendezvous for all sorts and conditions of men, who bring with them a very wide variety of religious customs. Corinth was a principal gateway between the East and the West. Phoenician influence had been stronger there than anywhere else upon the soil of Europe.[2] The natural conclusion seems to be that S. Paul was fully alive to the danger which the Church of Corinth ran of being swamped by pagan ideas, and was at pains to guard against it. It is also conceivable that, even if there has been no direct borrowing from elsewhere, devout fancy has woven round the Lord's Supper a fabric of edifying but entirely unsubstantial belief.

But neither of these possibilities concerns us now. If either were admitted, or even proved to be fact, that would not touch the position of the Commemoration of the Lord's Supper in itself as an essential and immemorial element in the Christian system. And this commemoration is and always has been associated, quite definitely and exclusively, with the death of an historic Person. It exists, primarily at least, to commemorate that death, and no other reason for its observance has ever been advanced. From this point of view it does not matter whether it were directly instituted as a perpetual ordinance by Christ Himself, or whether, as some people are inclined to hold, it sprang naturally from the affection and gratitude of His first personal disciples. On no hypothesis can its existence be accounted for apart from the actual death of a real Person. And it is not illegitimate to add that, in the eyes of those who were acquainted with the facts, that

[1] *1 Cor.* 10[21].

[2] The empire of Carthage (a Phoenician colony) in Spain, Sicily, and Sardinia had come to an end more than two centuries before the Christian era and appears to have left no permanent mark.

death must have been of unique significance, though it might have been impossible for them to explain in words precisely how or why. No other death has ever been thought worthy of frequent, universal, and perpetual commemoration by those who witnessed it and were familiar with the life which it brought to a close.

Again: the observance of the first day in each week as a holy day was a new departure which owed nothing to either Jewish or pagan custom. It too has always been associated quite definitely and exclusively with one particular historical event: namely, the resurrection of Christ. It cannot be explained upon any other hypothesis. At the least it must be admitted that His disciples became convinced that He was no longer dead but alive, and that it was upon the first day of the week that this belief first took shape in their minds.

If this were indeed a fact its claim to perpetual commemoration is necessarily beyond dispute, and it is obviously not a fact which any one would find easy to accept. It is impossible to imagine anything more difficult than to convince a body of men that some one who had died before their eyes, and had been buried by their own hands, was in fact not dead but alive. Yet there is no question that the first disciples of Christ did become convinced of this and succeeded in imparting their convictions to a larger circle, which has continued to expand from that day to this. This conviction cannot be dismissed summarily as illusion. Even if we feel bound to question its validity, it is something of which we are bound to take account. No survey of the varieties of religious experience which fails to reckon with it has any title to be regarded as complete. And it follows that a Person who rose from the dead—perhaps we might even say a Person who had so impressed His disciples that it even came to seem conceivable to them that He should have risen from the dead—cannot be compressed within the limits of normal humanity. Our knowledge of ourselves and our ordinary experience of others cannot enable us to predicate anything positively about Him. We must be prepared to regard Him as absolutely unique.

It is true that there have been other heroes who have been believed to be alive after they had disappeared from the scene of their activities. But that was because some mystery was believed

to have overhung their end. No one knew how, when, or where they had died. There was no one who could say, I laid him in the grave with my own hands. Accordingly, the belief arose that in reality they had not died. But it has never rested upon any appearance after the supposed date of death. The hope that they would manifest themselves again alive has always been disappointed. It has never inspired any perpetual ordinance, and in the course of time has faded away. The Christian story is entirely different. No mystery surrounds the death or burial of Christ, and the belief that He was not dead but alive was forced upon the minds of His followers by a succession of unexpected events.

The fundamental Christian beliefs, that Christ is an historic Person who really died and rose again from the dead and that His death is an event of unique and permanent significance are in the first place attested by a living tradition which can neither be ignored nor set aside. Christianity leans upon these facts with all its weight. If this appear to be hazardous it must be remembered that there are no other facts of ancient history which are attested in the same way, or in anything resembling the same degree, at the present time.

Provided that no attempt be made to extend its range in order to stereotype what are merely matters of ecclesiastical arrangement, the living tradition of the Christian Church is a foundation of enormous strength. It deserves to receive more consideration than is as a rule bestowed upon it in England. It would probably never occur to most Englishmen to mention the tradition of the Church as a ground for accepting the Christian religion.

Parallel with this tradition is the documentary evidence contained in the New Testament. It is hardly possible to exaggerate the importance of this. In the first place: All the books of the New Testament profess to have been written either by people who had first-hand knowledge of the events of our Lord's life, or by people who had access to those who possessed this knowledge. It is on this ground that they were accepted by the Church (by a process of which more will be said in a later chapter) as trustworthy and exalted to the position of Scripture, so that there has come to be a body of Christian Scriptures in addition to the Hebrew Scriptures which the Christian society inherited from its Jewish ancestors.

Secondly: The New Testament supplies us with much valuable information which we could not have derived from any other source. The living Christian tradition may be sufficient to assure us that Christ really lived, died, and rose again from the dead. But there it stops. It does not preserve for us any single fragment of His teaching;[1] nor does it enable us to form any very clear picture of the effect which He produced upon His contemporaries. If we had no other source of information, the possibility that the estimate of His Person and of the significance of His Life which has established itself in the Church is exaggerated would approach a probability. At any rate it would have to be considered very seriously indeed.

Thirdly: The written word of the New Testament being unalterable supplies the Church for all time with a fixed standard of reference, by which to test all developments of Christian thought and practice. Experience has shown that this is indispensable, whatever drawbacks might be considered to attach to it in theory. Without some such standard it would be quite impossible to check the vagaries of pious fancy until eventually the genuine tradition would be smothered under a mass of accretions whose only recommendation would be that in the eyes of some Christian teachers they were of practical value for purposes of edification.

In spite of the existence of the New Testament this has happened to some extent from time to time in the past, but the fact that there were documents to which an appeal could be made has rendered recovery possible. The danger can never be very far away: especially when the Church as a whole, or any part of it, is unable to obtain well-instructed and intelligent persons to give their lives to the teaching of religion. The very large number of Christian teachers required by the Church's parochial system in any Christian country makes it impossible that the maintenance of a high standard of attainment amongst them should ever be easy. From time to time political or economic conditions may make it exceptionally difficult, and it is then not unlikely that religion will suffer.

If the New Testament does not stand entirely alone, in the sense that it cannot be divorced from the living Christian tradition

[1] It is possible that liturgies might have preserved some of the words which He used at the Last Supper.

which gave it birth originally, it is admittedly of unique and supreme importance. It is, and must always remain, one of the great foundations on which the whole fabric of Christian belief rests. It is therefore right that its strength should be tested in every possible way, and those who venture to call themselves disciples of Him who declared Himself to be the Truth must be the last people to feel any apprehension as to the possible results of such examination.

III. THE EARLIEST DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

THE primary function of the Christian Church is to preserve the memory of the historical events upon which its system of belief and practice rests. Its conception of God may be capable of expression in more than one formula, but is ultimately derived from one source only. Its ethical ideals must become intellectually unintelligible and morally impotent if they are divorced from the historical events which gave them birth. These events have inspired a living tradition, the evidential value of which is by no means negligible. But if we desire anything resembling a detailed knowledge of them, if we require more than the bald statement that Christ died and rose again, we must turn to the documents contained in the New Testament.

The Church places very great reliance in these and regards them as of unique, supreme, and unalterable importance. This is not questioned in any part of the Christian world, however widely the interpretation put upon particular passages may differ. Accordingly, it is necessary that the New Testament should be submitted to rigorous scrutiny, with a view to testing, so far as lies in our power, the historical accuracy of its contents.

First, by scientific study and comparison of the manuscript copies, an effort must be made to eliminate any mistakes which may have been made by copyists before the days of printing. It is quite inevitable that there should be a considerable number of these, and they may be important or unimportant, obvious or difficult to detect. It may also have happened that the marginal comment of one scribe has been incorporated into the text by the next, either by inadvertence or in the belief that it belonged to the original work. Whenever we have to deal with books older than the invention of printing our first task is to try to recover exactly what the author really wrote. The greater the demand for a book, and therefore the more numerous the copies made, the more difficult this is likely to prove.

Secondly, we must ascertain anything we can about the date and authorship of the books of the New Testament, as it is obvious

that this may affect very deeply our estimate of their historic credibility.

Our generation is better equipped for these undertakings than any previous one has ever been, and the result of modern studies has been that the New Testament has become a somewhat different thing. If we are compelled to feel that the reverence with which it has sometimes been regarded in the past was somewhat ill-informed, we may hope that we are in a position to understand it better than it has ever been understood before, and this must mean that it has become more valuable to us. If we believe that our religion is concerned with a knowledge of the truth, and with nothing else, any misconceptions with regard to any part or aspect of it which may have arisen can only prove injurious, however venerable, convenient, or popular they may be.

Here it may be worth while to point out that we are not bound to accept as certain truth every new opinion as soon as it is promulgated. It is probable that in most cases the author would not wish us to do so. There can be no advance of knowledge without experiment, in any field, and the number of unsuccessful experiments is likely to be large.[1] This is universally recognized in the domain of natural science, and the Christian scholar is entitled to the liberty which is conceded to the chemist in his laboratory. He must be allowed to make experiments: that is to say, to advance new theories which for the moment appear to commend themselves to him. He must, of course, be prepared to admit that for the moment they are experiments and nothing more. They must be submitted to the judgement of those who are competent to criticize them, and their final acceptance or rejection must depend on the verdict passed. And a considerable period of time may sometimes have to elapse before it is possible to say that any verdict has been passed.

This principle of experiment is no new thing. There is a good example of it to be seen in our Nicene Creed. The phrase *of one substance with*, which we use there to express the personal relationship between our Lord and the Father, is a rough translation of a single word in the original Greek. This word was submitted

[1] I believe that a valuable drug known as 606 was so called because the discoverer, an eminent physician, made 605 unsuccessful experiments before arriving at the desired compound.

to a council held at Antioch in the year 269, when the views of Paul of Samosata regarding the Person of our Lord were under discussion. It was rejected on the ground that it was an innovation and did not occur in Scripture. Some fifty years later it was accepted, and passed into general usage, because it was recognized as likely to be a valuable safe-guard of the position which the Church desired to maintain. It has proved successful, and no one is likely to suggest its removal from the Creed now.

Similar experiments must be made from time to time in the field of Biblical scholarship: that is to say, new theories as to the date or authorship of any particular book, or as to the meaning of any particular passage must be advanced. Then time must be allowed to elapse while the world of learning passes judgement upon them. It will sometimes happen that a theory which seemed plausible and commanded a considerable measure of assent at its first appearance is eventually discarded, and that one which at the outset carried little conviction wins its way to general acceptance. It is of real importance that the experimental character of a large part of the work which is done by Christian scholars and thinkers should be fully recognized, in order that a due measure of intellectual liberty may be secured to them. The publicity which in modern times attends their proceedings makes this difficult. On their side they must remember that an experimental suggestion must be advanced as a suggestion which invites criticism, and for the moment as nothing more. It must not be put forward as if it were a conclusion which only the stupid or cowardly can possibly presume to dispute.

All Christian people are familiar with the New Testament, and, at least until very recent times, have always regarded it with unquestioning reverence as the oracles of God. We are accustomed to hear small portions of it read in public worship, and when we study it by ourselves our practice is probably to read a few verses at a time only. We read them slowly, with great care, pondering the meaning of every word and phrase. No fault can be found with this method: indeed it is essential that the New Testament should be read in this way. But the fact remains that this practice does not help us to grasp its character as a whole. It would probably be difficult to find any one who has ever read it through, from the beginning of S. Matthew's Gospel to the end

of the Revelation of S. John, at a single sitting: and perhaps not easy to find many people who have ever read any one of the longer books in this way. Yet if we confine ourselves to what may be called piecemeal study, it is not unlikely that we shall miss a good deal of real value.

No small part of the strength of the Christian system lies in its coherence as a whole. No single element in it can be isolated and discussed without reference to its relation with other elements and with the whole. One of the most important duties of the organized Christian society has always been, is, and always will be, to keep this principle steadily in view, and to refuse to allow any element to be neglected, or over-emphasized at the expense of any other. Attempts to do both these things are made continually, with the best intentions, by people in whose minds local or temporary circumstances dwarf all other considerations. There will always be considerable numbers of people whose natural disposition is to take account of nothing save what lies obviously and immediately before them, and they will inevitably try to reduce the Christian system to the level of a merely sectional interest.[1] In practice the Church has not always been entirely successful in withstanding these well-meant efforts. Its power of doing so at any given moment will depend principally upon the equipment of its accredited teachers. An ignorant clergy can have very little power of resistance, and may even be unaware that there is anything in the piety of their day which needs to be resisted, in the interests of the truth which the Christian system as a whole has been constructed to preserve unimpaired.

If justice cannot be done to the Christian system unless it is considered as a whole, it is at least possible that this may also be true of the Christian Scriptures, on which the system ultimately rests. It is important to consider them as a whole as well as in detail, and worth while to try to realize what impression, taken as a whole, they are likely to produce upon the mind of the reader.[2]

[1] If it be thought that the Church of England owes too much to insular patriotism it may be argued that the Church of Rome has been moulded by the political exigencies of an Italian principality. The element of truth in either statement is approximately the same.

[2] The necessary coherence of Scripture is recognized by the Church of England in the statement that it is not lawful for the Church so to expound one place of Scripture that it be repugnant to another. (*Articles of Religion,*

If we can imagine ourselves reading the New Testament for the first time, and were to peruse it from cover to cover at a single sitting, what would be the general effect which it would produce upon us?

First: before we attempted to estimate its significance in any way we could hardly fail to be struck with surprise at its extreme brevity. It would be difficult to repress a feeling of astonishment that the Church should be content with so small an amount of sacred literature of its own, and that the specifically Christian Scriptures should be so much shorter than those which have been inherited from the Jews. It is only the fact that we are familiar with the New Testament as it is, and should regard the prospect of any addition to it as inconceivable, which prevents us from recognizing how very little of it there is.

Secondly: we should note that of the twenty-seven separate documents which it contains no less than twenty-one are letters. Some of them might be called lengthy letters: but the longest of them would be no more than a short pamphlet if it were published by itself.

Of these letters four are without doubt private.[1] They are addressed to individuals, and the author did not intend that they should ever be read by any one except the addressee. The same is probably true of two others.[2] Of the remaining fifteen two only approach the nature of formal treatises,[3] and it is probable that no more than a local circulation was intended even for them. The only one which can be considered to have been intended for universal circulation, and for all time, is the first epistle of S. John. If it were written as a covering letter to the fourth Gospel (which is no more than a conjecture, if a plausible one), it may be presumed that the author expected that the two would always be read together, so that his letter would have the same circulation as his longer work.

No. XX: *Of the Authority of the Church.*) But this does not go farther than assert that no two passages of Scripture can be understood to be contradictory.

[1] *1* and *2 Timothy*, *Titus*, and *Philemon*.

[2] *2* and *3 John*. It is possible that *the elect lady* is not an individual but a community. *Gaius* was to some extent a stock name as it was used in one of the Roman marriage ceremonies. Here it is probably an individual.

[3] *Romans* and *Ephesians*

But with this possible exception no one of the epistles was expected or intended by its author to become the common property of the whole Church for ever; and the idea that they would or could come to rank as Scripture and be placed on a level with the Old Testament, or even upon a higher plane of importance, would have been scouted as ridiculous and profane.

Again: if the fact were not entirely familiar it would cause considerable surprise, not perhaps unmixed with misgiving, to discover that so large a part of the scanty Christian Scriptures is of so informal, occasional, and we might almost add fugitive a character. It is very remarkable that we to-day read and revere works which were never intended to come into our hands, and find a permanent standard of belief and conduct in writings which were produced originally to serve a local and temporary purpose.

If Christianity were primarily a system of philosophic speculation, writings such as these could be of very little value. We should require and expect detailed treatises of a formal character in which the principles of the new religion were fully worked out for our benefit by those whose creation they were. If the Christian Scriptures were to be regarded as a *summa theologiae* containing in explicit form all that any Christian could ever need to know about his religion,[1] they would have to be very much longer than they are. In other words—if the Christian religion were something entirely different from what it is it would need Scriptures of a very different character.

But as Christianity is a philosophy of history, and, as has been said in the previous chapter, lays especial emphasis on one set of historical events, it follows that letters, and even brief letters, may be of real value for the study of its origins. Letters, if genuine, are of the greatest possible value to the historian, because they have not been intended for publication or for permanent circulation. The author of a formal treatise may be unduly biassed by a desire to justify some particular point of view, and he is not unlikely, if he deals with historical events, to be compelled to treat of matters of which he has no first-hand knowledge. The sources of his information may be incomplete or inaccurate, and it may be beyond the power of posterity to check them in any way.

[1] As the Koran appears to be for Islam and the Granth for the Sikhs.

The position of the letter-writer is entirely different. He writes spontaneously in view of the circumstances of the moment, and has to assume a certain amount, it may be much or little, of knowledge as common to him and to his correspondent. What he says represents his own genuine beliefs and desires, and what he implies must have been common property at the time. If the writer of a letter refers to any event, particularly if it is an event of a startling or unusual character, without explanation or apology, it follows that that event was regarded as indisputable by others beside himself.

For the historian the information which can be gathered from letters may be less complete and direct than could be desired. But what there is to be had is worth its weight in gold. A religion which professes to owe its existence to the occurrence of certain historical events of an unusual character could desire nothing better than that its earliest written records should include a number of letters.

The first question which arises is naturally—Are the letters genuine? That is to say—Were they written by the people whose names have been attached to them, so that they give us a trustworthy picture of Christian life and belief in the apostolic age, or are they the forgeries of a later generation which desired to claim apostolic authority for its own opinions?

A tradition which until modern times had not been questioned seriously for many centuries, ascribes thirteen of them to S. Paul, three to S. John, two to S. Peter, and one each to James and Jude.

In the case of *Hebrews* there can be no question that the tradition is incorrect. In fact the style and line of argument really justify us in saying that the one person who cannot possibly have written it is S. Paul. The difficulty in assigning it to him was felt in early times and an attempt to overcome it was made by suggesting that S. Paul had written it in Aramaic and that S. Luke, or Clement Bishop of Rome, had translated it into Greek. There is no scrap of evidence which can be cited in support of this view. *Hebrews* appeared anonymously and did not achieve any very rapid success. For a time the vastly inferior epistle of Barnabas, which was written to deal with the same subject, namely the passing away of the Mosaic Law, seems to have been much more popular: partly, perhaps, because it demands less of its readers.

The authoritative tone adopted by the author of *Hebrews* in the last chapter,[1] and his reference to *our brother Timothy*,[2] suggest that he was, or at least that the wished to be taken for, a member of the apostolic circle. But attempts to find a name for him have hitherto amounted to no more than ingenious conjectures. The problem of his identity seems likely to remain permanently insoluble.

In modern times doubt has also been thrown upon the authenticity of the three pastoral epistles: namely the two addressed to Timothy and the one addressed to Titus.

The first ground of suspicion is the definite—some critics might say rigid—character of the ecclesiastical organization which they reveal. Bishop and Deacon appear to be universally recognized offices which are as a matter of course to be found in every local church.[3] The passing reference to *elders that rule well*[4] implies another body of officials with whom every Christian was perfectly familiar. *Widows*[5] seem to be a recognized class in the Church, whose proceedings call for regulation, and there is more than the hint of the possibility of definitely organized opposition.[6]

It is argued that all this implies a date considerably later than the close of S. Paul's life. The Church known to the author of these epistles has obviously a history of some length behind it. Its beliefs and practices have crystallized in a way which would have been impossible in so short a time as that which can have elapsed if these letters are by the hand of S. Paul.

A very minute analysis of the language has shown that these epistles contain a very large number of words and expressions which are not found elsewhere in S. Paul's writings. Style, no less than contents, is considered to make it impossible to believe that the letters as they stand now are S. Paul's work. They probably contain some fragments of letters which were really addressed by him to Timothy and Titus, but these have been worked into a second-century treatise on church order by some one who wished to claim the highest authority for his own opinions.

It is only fair to say that this proceeding would not have

[1] e.g. vv. 1, 7, 9, 17.
[2] 13^{23}.
[3] *1 Tim.* 3^{1-13}; *Titus* 1^{7-9}.
[4] *1 Tim.* 5^{17-19}.
[5] *1 Tim.* 5^{3-16}; *Titus* 2^{3-5}.
[6] *1 Tim.* 1^{19-20}; 4^{1-7}; 6^{3-10}; *2 Tim.* 2^{14-19}; 4^{3-4}; *Titus* 1^{10-16}; 3^{9-11}.

appeared as dishonest in the eyes of the author or of his contemporaries as it does in our own. The convention of an author concealing his own identity by prefixing some famous and venerable name to his book had long been familiar in Jewish circles, and it is not easy to say exactly how much intention to deceive the reader it implies. If it were known that S. Paul had written at length to both Timothy and Titus, and if no complete copy of his letters could be discovered, the literary conventions of the time would have seen no particular harm in incorporating such genuine fragments as were available into a larger work which was considered to represent what the apostle must have said. The whole would then, naturally, have been put out under this name.

These arguments against the authenticity of these epistles cannot be dismissed as negligible, but personally I have never found them quite convincing. It seems to be impossible to say exactly how rapidly the organization of the Christian community might have developed in any particular locality. The growth of new movements is sometimes astonishingly rapid, and it is to be remembered that the Christian assemblies were at that time the only free ones in the world. There were no politics as we understand them, because the government was despotic, and the affairs of the Christian society gathered to themselves all the sort of interest which now finds vent in a variety of other ways. Parties were likely to form rapidly in the Church, and party-feeling might well run high because there were no other topics of public interest which could be discussed with safety, and very little else over which it could be worth the while of any two people to disagree. We may admit that the condition of the churches of Ephesus and Crete over which Timothy and Titus were being sent to preside, does not appear to have been what we might have expected. But it is rash to assume positively that it could not have been such as it is depicted in these epistles.

The mission of Timothy and Titus seems to have been of an exceptional character. They were not apostles, and there is no suggestion that the title was ever extended to them as it appears to have been to some others[1] (beside S. Paul himself) who were not members of the original twelve. Yet they appear to be sent

[1] *Rom.* 16^{7}.

to exercise the apostolic authority and to discharge the apostolic functions which in later history have become the property of the Bishop. Their commission (if we may so describe it) may have been temporary and informal, but it was undoubtedly a new and bold departure. And this fact might have led S. Paul to express himself, in the course of what were entirely private communications, in a strain very different from that of his earlier writings, which were intended to receive a certain degree of publicity.

Moreover, if these letters are by the hand of S. Paul, they must belong to that period of his life of which we know nothing. They must have been written between his first trial at Rome, for which he is waiting at the close of *Acts*, and acquittal, and the second trial which ended in his death. We do not know where he went nor what he did during those years. It is possible that he accomplished his proposed journey to Spain.[1] The mention of Nicopolis[2] gives no clue, as there were several places of the name.

It seems to me to be impossible to say what effect advancing years and a complete change of surroundings (possibly involving the habitual use of some new language) might have upon the vocabulary of any given person. If the Pastoral Epistles must be regarded with suspicion, it is not safe to assert positively that they are not the work of S. Paul. There is no reasonable ground for questioning any of the other ten epistles which are ascribed to him, though it is possible that what we know as *2 Corinthians* is not one letter but two, the division occurring at the end of chapter 9, and that the personal salutations in the last chapter of our *Romans* belong in reality to *Ephesians*. It is not easy to see how S. Paul could have had so many personal friends in a place which he had never visited.

There are no grounds for questioning the genuineness of the epistle of James. Its strongly Jewish flavour points to an early date, and entitles us to assign it with confidence to the James who was known as *the Lord's brother*, who, until his murder in or about the year 62, furnished a living link between the old and new dispensations. He was also known as *the Just*, and seems to have held a unique position, inasmuch as he was nearly related to our

[1] *Rom.* 15[24]. We know nothing about the expedition to Illyricum to which he refers in v. 19 of the same chapter.

[2] *Titus* 3[12].

Lord, was a prominent person in the church of Jerusalem,[1] and was regarded as a saint by the Jewish populace.

There is considerable uncertainty surrounding the authorship of the three epistles ascribed to S. John.

The first is certainly by the author of the fourth Gospel, and this raises the much-debated question whether John the Evangelist and John the Apostle are the same person or not. It is unnecessary to go into all the arguments for and against the identity of the two here. To me they seem to be so weighty and so evenly balanced that either view is reasonably tenable. If the evangelist were not the same person as the apostle I believe him to have been a member of the first circle of disciples, and an eye-witness of our Lord's life. The rapid and unquestioned acceptance of the fourth Gospel by the Christian world suggests that it was known to have proceeded from an authority which was above suspicion, and the authority behind the first epistle is indisputably the same.

The author of the second and third epistles describes himself as *the Elder*, and it is unlikely that we shall ever know for certain whether this title was intended to distinguish him from the Evangelist or not. We cannot say positively whether apostle, evangelist, and elder are three people or two, or one and the same. Whoever the author of these two epistles may have been, and whoever the recipients for whom they were intended, he writes with a note of authority. He does not contemplate the possibility that his right to determine disputes of any kind will be disregarded or even challenged.

The first epistle of Peter may reasonably be ascribed to the apostle whose name it bears. Doubt has been cast upon it, chiefly on account of the reference to suffering *as a Christian*.[2] It has been argued that this means that the mere profession of Christianity had come to be a crime in the eyes of the law, so that a Christian might be put to death solely because he was a Christian, without any attempt to prove him guilty of any other offence, and that as this was not the case until after the year 70, by which

[1] Tradition makes him first Bishop of Jerusalem. He may have presided at assemblies as we find him doing in *Acts* 15, but he can hardly have been Bishop as we understand the title.

[2] 3^{16}.

time S. Peter must be assumed to have been dead, these words cannot have been written by him.

It may be true that there is no evidence beyond this passage that the law was directly hostile to Christianity as such during S. Peter's lifetime, but that does not entitle us to say positively that it was not. Moreover, a good deal depends upon the way in which the law is administered in any particular locality. It might be much sharper in practice against any given offence in one place than in another. One body of magistrates might be inclined to strain it in the direction of leniency, and another in that of severity,[1] and S. Peter and his correspondents would be less concerned with how the law really stood than with the way in which they found it being administered as regards themselves. Also: it is not absolutely certain that the apostle is referring to legal processes. An unpopular sect may suffer a good deal at the hands of its neighbours without any legal persecution, particularly if its status was so dubious that its members would be ill advised to attract attention to themselves by invoking the protection of the law.[2]

Any difficulties which may be felt in assigning this epistle to the apostle are less serious than those which arise if we attempt to assign it to any one else.

The second epistle of Peter takes us into a very different atmosphere. It professes to be the work of the apostle, but its thought and style have nothing in common with the first epistle. The reference to *our beloved brother Paul*, whose epistles have acquired a position of general authority and are apparently already being regarded as Scripture,[3] is a further ground of suspicion, as it suggests a later date than any to which S. Peter himself can be supposed to have lived.

It has certain obvious affinities with the shorter epistle of Jude. Both refer to the punishment of the rebellious angels, which

[1] e.g. in England to-day the game-laws are uniform throughout the country. But the actual treatment which poachers receive at the hands of the local magistrates seems to vary considerably from time to time and from place to place.

[2] S. Paul was in an exceptional position as a Roman citizen with rights which he need not hesitate to claim. The Roman citizenship was probably as rare amongst the Christians of the apostolic age as a title is amongst the clergy of the Church of England to-day.

[3] 3^{15-17}.

means that they rely on books which were not included in the canon of the Old Testament; both speak of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as an outstanding instance of God's judgement upon sinners: both mention Balaam. *Peter* speaks quite definitely of the coming destruction of the world by fire. It is possible that *Jude* does the same, though the expression *snatching them out of the fire* may be merely metaphorical. *Jude* has also two distinct quotations from non-canonical books.

These considerations make it virtually certain that neither of these epistles is by the author whose name appears in the title. It seems impossible to assign them to a date earlier than the last ten years of the first century, and it is conceivable that they belong to the second. It is difficult to dissociate them from a group of writings which were produced under the name of Peter in the second century, of which more will be said in a later chapter.

If *2 Peter* and *Jude* were produced in the first century they might be slightly anterior to the Fourth Gospel, and this might have accounted for the fact that they were accorded a place in the Canon, whereas the other books which bore the name of Peter were rejected. Their claim to apostolic authorship, which was doubtless the principal ground of their inclusion in the Canon, would have been more likely to have been allowed if it were known that they had appeared during the apostolic age: that is to say before the last person who had seen the Lord was known to have passed away.

Of the twenty-one letters which have been included in the New Testament we may safely regard fourteen at least as genuine. Of these ten are the work of S. Paul, one is anonymous,[1] one is by S. Peter, one by S. James, and one by S. John. With the exception of the last they are all older than any of our Gospels, and are therefore the earliest Christian writings which we possess. The scientific study of Christianity must begin with them.

Now in every one of them the full Christian tradition appears, complete and astonishing, as in Greek legend the goddess Athene was fabled to have sprung full grown from the head of her father

[1] *Hebrews.* It is genuine in the sense that it was written during the first century (probably before the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70) and that there is no reason to doubt that the author was a member of the apostolic circle.

Zeus. It would not be true to say that the theology of the Nicene Creed is set forth in them explicitly: and there is some divergence of opinion as to how far it is a legitimate deduction from what they imply. It is possible to trace some theological development in S. Paul's mind during the period of some twenty years which separates his latest [1] from his earliest [2] writings. If the speeches reported in *Acts* reflect faithfully the tenor of S. Peter's early teaching, his theology too had advanced considerably by the time he came to write his epistle.

But theology is the interpretation put upon religious experience, and a change of interpretation does not involve any change in belief as to the original facts on which the religion rests. The epistles give no hint of any addition to or alteration in the outstanding facts of the Christian tradition. No one can read them without seeing that the writers believed that a man named Jesus, to whom the title *Christ* is frequently given, so that he may be spoken of either as *Jesus* or as *Christ* (or by a combination of name and title as *Jesus Christ*) had died, and had risen from the dead. His life and death are plainly regarded as very recent events which, at the time of writing, are attested by living memory.

Startling as this is, if the question were asked—What has become of Him now?—the reply which would be returned by the writers of these epistles would be, if possible, more startling still. It is their belief that He is enthroned at the very centre of the spiritual order, and language which would have seemed fitted to be used of none save God Himself may with perfect propriety be used of Him. Indeed no other would be in the least adequate to His position.

It also appears that He met His death by ignominious public execution, and that His life and death have somehow made the world a different place. They have created an entirely new ethical standard for daily life, and have enlarged man's spiritual horizon to an undreamed of extent. They have had some unique effect upon sin. No attempt to define or analyse the precise nature of this effect is made: where it is spoken of explicitly metaphor is always employed. But there is no doubt as to its reality, and it might be described roughly by saying that man's immemorial

[1] *Ephesians*. [2] *Thessalonians* or *Galatians*.

conflict with sin, though not yet at an end, has been changed from a losing to a winning battle.

No explanation of these astonishing assertions is ever vouchsafed. That these things are so is the ground-work of every argument in every letter, whatever the particular issue which caused it to be written. They are the standard to which everything is to be referred, by which every question of faith, morals, or ethics is to be decided. It therefore follows that the recipients of the letters were familiar with them. If they were not as axiomatic in the minds of those who were intended to read the letters as they were in the minds of those who wrote them, there is hardly a paragraph in any one of the epistles which would have been intelligible.

Here we are brought face to face with the same Christian tradition which inspires the observance of Sunday and the commemoration of the Lord's Supper, not as it were in embryo, but in full and complete form. The foundation of it is not the speculation of any individual, but a series of historic facts which are regarded as perfectly indisputable, and within the circle of those concerned, as a matter of common knowledge.

This is the more significant when we reflect that these strange convictions are not confined to a few eccentric individuals in any particular locality. Knowledge of the facts, and acceptance of them as facts, coupled with some appreciation of the momentous consequences of this acceptance, has already spread as far as to Rome, Ephesus, Thessalonica, and Corinth. In all these places, to say nothing of others, there are groups of people with whom it is possible to argue on this basis. It is not easy to see how any historical events could be more strongly and remarkably attested. If we were to consider what sort of evidence for the facts on which the Christian religion rests we could reasonably expect to possess, could we expect any more cogent than that which is furnished by the apostolic letters?

So far we have been considering only the fourteen letters whose authenticity is not reasonably open to question, though it would probably not be impossible to find some one who has challenged every one of them. They show us what four very prominent members[1] of the apostolic circle regarded as indisputable facts

[1] James was probably not one of the Twelve, but became prominent in

about our Lord while His ministry was still within living memory.[1]

It is, however, to be noted that the testimony of the seven 'suspected' letters is entirely in accord with that of the first fourteen. For their burden is—Hold fast to the old familiar Christian tradition. You have received the truth. Resist all innovations as they are merely attempts to adulterate it with specious falsehood.

It is quite clear that in the minds of the writers there was a quite definite body of traditional teaching to which appeal could be made. It is possible—in the case of *2 Peter* and *Jude* virtually certain—that this knowledge was not based on first-hand personal experience. It is what they had been taught by others: but there is no uncertainty as to its content. And it must have been equally familiar to those whom they were addressing, because there is no attempt to describe it in any detail. The need for a formal Creed: that is to say, for some short and simple form of words which would sum up the outstanding facts on which the Christian religion rests, has hardly begun to be felt. Certainly no recognized attempt to provide one has yet been made. But for all that, there is a definite body of traditional Christian belief relating to the Life, Death, Resurrection, and Person of our Lord which cannot be tampered with or explained away. The first duty of all Christian people is to preserve this unimpaired: and it is the standard by which all religious belief and practice is to be tried.

It is hard to say which is really more striking in the apostolic letters, the freshness and originality with which unforeseen problems are dealt with, or the unbending conservatism[2] displayed with regard to the historic facts on which the whole Christian scheme rests.

It is probable that the great majority of Church-goers have never realized how strong the historic testimony of the epistles is.

the Church at Jerusalem very shortly after the Ascension. John must also have been a leading figure whether he were an Apostle or not.

[1] *1 John* was written by some one who had first-hand knowledge of the events, though when he put pen to paper he may have been the last survivor of his generation.

[2] In the seven 'suspected' epistles the conservative element predominates. It would naturally tend to increase as time went on, and would inevitably fill a larger place in the minds of the second or third generation of Christians than in the leaders of the first.

We are not accustomed to consider them from that point of view. We never hear one of the longer ones read straight through in public. We are accustomed to regard them all as being primarily controversial documents, as indeed they are, and this has led us to use them primarily as a controversial armoury.

Attempts have been made to settle such vexed questions as the relation between God's fore-knowledge and our own free-will, or between faith and works in the Christian scheme of life, by culling texts from the epistles. It has even been thought possible to extract from their pages explicit instructions of permanent validity as to the only way in which the Christian society should be organized and administered for all time.

Somewhat divergent conclusions have been reached with reference to all these questions: a fact which suggests that this method of using the epistles is not entirely legitimate. It means handling them in a way which was not contemplated by their authors, and endeavouring to adapt them to purposes which they were not intended to serve.

I do not of course mean to suggest that the epistles are not to be studied minutely and in detail. Elaborate commentaries upon them are of real value: and it is perhaps one of the glories of the Church of England that in modern times its output of first-class work of this kind has been larger than that of any other body. It is obviously by no means unlikely that even the *obiter dicta* of an apostolic writer will prove to be of permanent value. But such detailed study can only be directly accessible to a limited circle of readers, which can never exceed the comparatively small number of those who have learned Greek. It can hardly reach the ordinary Church-goer at all. It is probable that to him the greater part of the majority of the epistles remains a sealed book. A few isolated phrases may lodge in his mind, but the value of the collection as a whole, as a witness to the fundamental facts on which the Christian religion is built, tends to escape his observation. No detailed study, even if it stop short of trying to make the epistles a controversial armoury, should be allowed to obscure the force of this collective testimony. Once our attention has been called to it, it is sufficiently obvious, but to perceive it we do need to read the epistles in a new and somewhat unfamiliar way. The truth of the great Christian facts is assumed throughout, and the refer-

ences to them are so numerous that it is unnecessary to try to illustrate them by quotation.

Another surprising fact which the epistles reveal is the rapidity with which these convictions had spread. It is conceivable that this might be used as an argument against their authenticity. We might be disposed to think that Christianity could not possibly have spread as rapidly as it is represented to have done, so that documents which purport to belong to about the middle of the first century of our era could not in reality have been produced until well on in the second. By that time Christianity had diffused itself over a wide area by a process of which the details are unknown, and had not improbably undergone considerable modifications in the process. In these circumstances it would be natural for certain churches, especially outstanding ones such as those of Rome and Ephesus, to claim apostolic origin and to endeavour to make out that what they held was, in substance at least, identical with what they had held from the beginning.

I think that there might be some weight in this argument, if we had not got the book *Acts*. That does not profess to be a complete record of everything which took place, but illustrates for us sufficiently the way in which the Christian Gospel spread from Jerusalem. Its diffusion was not left to chance. On the contrary, trustworthy teachers were carefully chosen and dispatched for the purpose. A deliberate effort was made to propagate the new religion as widely as possible, and the main emphasis of the missionary preaching is represented as having been on the facts of our Lord's life. Again: it is unnecessary to try to illustrate these facts by quotations.

The truthfulness of the narrative is confirmed by the fact that there is no effort to show that the missionaries were marvellously or universally successful. Their fortunes were chequered. In some places they achieved a considerable measure of success; in some they gathered no more than a handful of followers; in some their work seems to have left no lasting mark. A romancer, whose only object was to glorify the memory of his heroes, would not have written in this strain.

During the last century attempts were made to discredit *Acts* entirely. It was regarded as a forgery belonging to the middle of the second century, which had been produced with a view to

effecting a reconciliation between the Petrine and Pauline parties in the Church. The first criticism which may be brought against this theory is that there is no evidence that there were Petrine and Pauline parties who required to be reconciled. It is true that there was a sharp divergence of opinion between the apostles as to the terms on which Gentile converts were to be admitted to the Church.[1] But a disagreement between two leaders, even if it cause them to adopt different spheres of work, does not necessarily create two hostile factions which continue for more than a century, and require to be elaborately reconciled long after the original cause of dissension has ceased to be an issue of any importance.

Common sense finds much less difficulty in believing that *Acts* is what it professes to be, namely a series of sketches of episodes in the early history of the Church, in some of which the author took part, than in accepting any other theory of its origin and motive. It fits in with the epistles because it accounts for the surprisingly wide geographical distribution of the Christian tradition which they reveal. If *Acts* be a genuine work, the general situation presented by the epistles ceases to be a matter of any difficulty. If the epistles are genuine, the course of events during the years immediately after the Ascension must have been not altogether unlike the story told in *Acts*.

Finally the Christian tradition is attested no less remarkably, albeit from a somewhat different angle, in the *Revelation of S. John*. The authorship of this book is uncertain. As early as the third century the difficulty of ascribing the *Revelation* to the author of the fourth Gospel was felt. It would probably be rash to say that they *cannot* be by the same hand, because we are not in a position to affirm positively how far style and thought and language might be affected by what is now known as 'the trance-state.'[2] Without entering upon a highly controversial topic, it appears to be the case that abnormal states of consciousness are possible for some people, and that when these occur those to whom they come are capable of writing in a strain which would have been quite impossible for them when in their normal condition.

The book appeared at the end of the first century, when John the Evangelist was still alive. More than that cannot be said with confidence. It is possible that as it stands now it is the work of

[1] *Gal.* 2^{6-21}. [2] *I was in the Spirit. Rev.* 1^{10}.

more than one hand, and the visions which it describes may have been seen at intervals during a considerable period of years. Commentators have been uncertain whether it should be assigned to the reign of Nero (54–68) or to that of Domitian (81–96), and the solution of the difficulty may be that some of the visions belong to the earlier period of persecution and some to the later.

The book is cast in a mould with which Jewish and Jewish-Christian circles had long been familiar. In a sense it is extraordinarily conventional. But as it is the only representative of its class which has attained canonical rank,[1] it is the only apocalypse[2] (to use the technical title) with which the ordinary Church-goer has much chance of making acquaintance. It presents itself to him as an isolated phenomenon, and this fact exposes it to considerable risk of misinterpretation. It has sometimes been treated as if it furnished us with a literally exact picture of the spiritual world and, perhaps more frequently, efforts have been made to read into it a detailed forecast of the course of history. In time of war people have turned to the Apocalypse of John in the belief that they could discover from it how long the war would last, and which side was destined to prove victorious.

It is hardly necessary to say that if the book be handled in this fashion its true significance will be obscured and much of its value will be missed.

The interpretation of some of the details is by no means certain. It would, for example, be difficult to say positively exactly what the author meant by the Two Witnesses,[3] and the number of the Beast admits of more than one reasonable interpretation.[4] No doubt points such as these presented no difficulty to the readers for whom the book was intended: it is only the inadequacy of our knowledge of the circumstances of the time which make them an enigma to us. The general sense of the whole book is perfectly clear. The author sees good and evil in the sharpest possible

[1] *Dan.* 7–12 and *Zech.* 14^{1-9} are apocalyptic episodes in, or additions to, the books of which they now form part. The second book of Esdras, which has found a place in what may be called the canonical apocrypha, is a Jewish-Christian apocalypse.

[2] The Greek word of which *Revelation* is the Latin equivalent. More will be said about apocalypses in general in a later chapter.

[3] 11^{3-13}.

[4] 13^{18}.

conflict. They are locked in a struggle in which there can be no such thing as a truce. It must end in the annihilation of one or the other. Evil is represented by the omnipotent Roman Empire: in fact, the Empire has become for the author Evil Incarnate. Against its almost superhuman prestige and overwhelming material resources are arrayed Jesus, and His servants on earth. But the issue of the struggle is not really doubtful. Despite all appearance to the contrary it has been decided already, and Jesus has triumphed. The Empire is, so to speak, existing on sufferance only. It will endure as long as He pleases, and its final destruction is quite certain.

Thus the whole argument of the book—so far as it can be said to possess one—is based on the same foundation as the arguments of the epistles. Jesus Christ is a real person who has died and is now alive for evermore. He holds the keys of hell and of death, an expression which would be meaningless blasphemy unless He were believed to be in a unique relation to the world and all that therein is. He has loosed us from our sins by His blood, and the effect of His Life and Death has been that even the Roman Empire has been reduced to a thing of nought. What more complete change in the course of human affairs could be conceived? If the Empire has in reality been reduced to impotence, then the world has become a different place indeed.

There is no doubt as to John's estimate of the Person of Christ, and of the place which he assigns to Him in the universe, and as He is introduced without explanation, we must assume that these conceptions were at least known to the readers for whom the apocalypse was intended. It would be unintelligible from beginning to end to any one who was not already familiar with the Christian tradition. John's deduction that the days of the Roman Empire were numbered may have been new to some of his readers, although S. Paul had some forty years before spoken of *the rulers of this world, which are coming to nought*[1]; but this is merely a question of whether there can be any limit to the subversive effect of Christianity upon the fabric of human society. It is no addition to the facts from which the subversive power takes its rise. Here, no less than in the epistles, we are brought face to face with the Christian tradition, resting on historic facts, which the

[1] *I Cor.* 2^6.

writer can assume to be as axiomatic to his readers as they are to himself.

Only five of the books of the New Testament can properly be called historic in the sense that they profess to give a connected narrative of historical events. It is therefore easy to ignore the extent and force of the historic evidence which is afforded, indirectly, by the remaining twenty-two. The fact that the evidence is largely indirect increases rather than diminishes its value.

IV. THE GOSPELS

IN the eyes of most people the epistles of the New Testament are of secondary importance only. Some of them are very brief, and the longer ones are not infrequently somewhat obscure. Their theological outlook is sometimes even regarded as an unnecessary addition to the simplicity of the original Gospel, and this carries with it the assumption that we can sit as loosely as we please to the teaching which they contain. The four Gospels are really the beginning and end of the whole matter: the Christian religion stands or falls by them.

In the preceding chapter an attempt was made to show that this view is not entirely justifiable. Most of the epistles were written before our Gospels, and are therefore the oldest Christian writings which we possess. They reveal what Christianity was understood to be by the Christian communities at various widely separated centres, before those who had seen the Lord had passed away. Most of them were written to meet special circumstances —crises would perhaps not be too strong a word—of local importance, but when allowance has been made for this 'occasional' element, they are all in remarkably close agreement. They attest with striking uniformity the Christian tradition as it was proclaimed and accepted between the middle and end of the first century of our era. They are able to assume it without attempting to explain, or even discuss, it in any detail. Thus though they are not, and do not profess to be, formal or connected history, the historical value of the evidence which they afford is very great. Their evidential value is not seriously impaired by the fact that the authorship of some of them is unknown or uncertain.

Acts illustrates the way in which the Christian tradition was diffused from its home at Jerusalem, with what might almost be regarded as unaccountable speed. It emphasizes the fact that this diffusion was not left to chance, but was for the most part due to systematic propaganda. Accredited teachers were sent out,[1] and were expected to give some account of their doings when they

[1] 13[2].

returned.[1] Authoritative supervision was exercised over the communities of believers.[2] There is nothing haphazard about the business at all. The Christian emissaries clearly regarded themselves as having certain definite information to impart,[3] which could not be derived from any other source, and efforts were made to ensure that it had been imparted and understood correctly. The whole atmosphere is unfavourable to the growth of legend.

From a somewhat different standpoint, and in a form unfamiliar to most modern readers, the same tradition is attested by the *Apocalypse of John*. Here again the point is not affected by any uncertainty which we may feel as to the authorship of the book. The author (or authors if the work is by more than one hand) could not have written as he did if he had not held the beliefs about Christ which were obviously common to the writers and recipients of the epistles.

The strength of this body of testimony does not seem to be as a rule fully appreciated. It is enhanced by the fact that it is independent of our Gospels. If they did not exist the other books of the New Testament would stand precisely where they do now. The historian would still be confronted with the sudden appearance of the Christian tradition as a definite, startling, unmistakable thing from the middle of the first century onwards. The difference would be that it would present itself to him as a wholly inexplicable phenomenon. There would be nothing in the history of the period which would account for it. There would be no circumstances to which its origin could be ascribed. He would be reduced to saying—There must be some very unusual story behind all this. But what it is we shall never know.

It is therefore not quite true to say that Christianity stands or falls with our four Gospels. It is unquestionable that if we had not got them we should miss a very great deal. Christianity would be a slighter thing than it is now, and the history of the Church would in all probability have been very different. But the Christian tradition, as attested by the epistles and preserved in the sacrament of the Lord's supper, would still exist. Recognition of this fact must affect very deeply indeed the mental attitude with which we approach the Gospels. We ought not to read them as if

[1] 14^{26-7}. [2] 8^{14-18}. [3] 17^{23}.

they were our first and only ground for being Christians: but in the hope that they will furnish some reasonable and coherent explanation of what is otherwise entirely unintelligible. To say this does not belittle their value or importance in any way. It merely reaffirms what S. Luke tells us explicitly[1] was his own motive in writing, and what may reasonably be presumed to have been the motive of the other three evangelists. If it were not their conscious motive, it is certainly the end which their works are fitted to serve.

The Gospels profess to be true history. They tell a story which, if it be true, is sufficient to account for the Christian tradition attested by the epistles. It is indeed difficult to imagine what other kind of story could possibly be sufficient: but it is of the highest importance for us to know whether we are justified in regarding this particular story as true or not. Our attitude on this point has been considerably modified of late years, both by recent studies and by modern ways of thinking.

In the first place we are safe in assuming that our Lord habitually spoke Aramaic. But there are only three occasions on which any utterance of His has been handed down to us in that language.[2] Almost all His shorter sayings, and all His longer discourses, are known to us through the medium of a Greek translation. It follows that we have not got the actual words which fell from His lips as they were heard by His disciples, and an absolutely exact and entirely perfect translation is a thing which can hardly exist. One language can hardly furnish the exact equivalent of another, and a rendering must owe something to the translator. We cannot say that we have a report of our Lord's sayings such as might be made to-day by a shorthand writer. We have a Greek translation of His sayings, and for reasons which will be adduced lower down, we cannot say when or by whom this translation was made. Moreover, certain slight discrepancies between what are plainly accounts of the same incident show that every word in our Gospels cannot be exactly true—as most English people have been accustomed to regard truth, at any rate in matters of religion. It is probable that we need to think more and

[1] 1^{1-4}.

[2] *Talitha Cumi, S. Mark* 5^{41}. *Ephphatha, S. Mark* 7^{34}. *Eloi Eloi lama sabachthani, S. Mark* 15^{34}.

more carefully than we generally do about what we really mean by *True History*.

It is possible to conceive a narrative of a series of events true to fact in every detail, in which the speeches of the actors were reported with the accuracy of a phonograph. And yet it might be difficult for the reader, especially at a considerable distance of time, to form any clear picture of the situation as a whole, or to discriminate in any way between the importance of any of the incidents which had been recorded. He might feel that he had been furnished laboriously—he might perhaps even say rather unintelligently—with the material for a picture rather than with the picture itself.

There might be another narrative of the same events less copious and less exact in detail which, if it were the work of a man of genius, might leave a much more accurate impression on the reader's mind. It would give him a picture drawn from first-hand knowledge, instead of leaving him to draw his own picture at second-hand. And it would not be easy to say which of these narratives had the better claim to be called *True History*. Each would undoubtedly possess some elements of superiority over the other. If modern taste might prefer the former, ancient inclination would certainly be in favour of the latter.

When we read the Gospels we have to consider both what we desire to find in them, and what it is possible that they should be. If, to use a metaphor, we are looking for an instantaneous photograph we are looking for something which we are not entitled to expect, and for something which might be of less value to us if it were obtainable than we might imagine. If, on the other hand, we are looking for a great picture, for something which may enable us to understand—even to a very limited extent—the nature of the spiritual impact upon the world of the Life which was once manifested before the eyes of men, we may find that we have got what we are seeking, and that what we have would have been of less value to us if it had been presented to us in any other form.

It is not intended to imply that any act or word which has been ascribed to our Lord can ever be regarded as unimportant. We do want to know, as accurately as we can, exactly what He did and said on all occasions, just as we would give a great deal for any authentic likeness of His features. But still, all such knowledge is

in a sense subsidiary to our main purpose, which is to understand how and why it is possible for us to-day to say of Him, not in any metaphorical or unreal sense, but with sober and literal truth—*O Saviour of the world, who by thy Cross and precious Blood hast redeemed us*.

It is possible that for this purpose the portrait of Him which we possess is as valuable as any other which could have come into our hands.

It is not very long since any questions as to the accuracy of the Evangelists which could have been raised would have been considered to have been set at rest by the mere statement that they were inspired. But this raises as many difficulties as it removes. If we are asked how we know that they were inspired we can only reply—*Because the Church says so*, and a very little investigation will show that this title was not bestowed upon them until there was no one left who could check their narrative by his own knowledge.[1] The evangelists never claim inspiration for themselves or for their writings as it is claimed by Isaiah,[2] Jeremiah,[3] Ezekiel,[4] or the Apocalypse of John.[5] In all these books the author asserts definitely that he received his message from a supernatural source and owed nothing to any human intermediary. That is a definite claim, and, while it can hardly be said to admit of proof, we can see grounds for its acceptance.

Isaiah's denunciations of formalism in religion reveal a moral elevation far above that of the great majority of his contemporaries. His conviction that the purposes of God are manifested in the course of human history, so that even the omnipotent Assyrian is but a pawn in God's hand and will be allowed to pursue his career of conquest as far as God wills and no farther, could only spring from spiritual insight of a very exceptional kind.

Jeremiah's belief that Jerusalem will be taken and destroyed, because its sin has deserved no other fate, and that after this appalling catastrophe the religion of Israel would be, as it were, reborn upon a higher plane, shows an insight into the mind of God beyond the reach of ordinary men.

The resolution with which Ezekiel proclaimed to the captives by the river Chebar that even now the position was not hopeless,

[1] See further Chapter V, *The Growth of the New Testament*.
[2] 6^1, 8^1. [3] 1^4, 2^1. [4] 1^1, 12^1. [5] 1^{10}.

but that it was within the power of God to restore the national life of a repentant people, may be said to have opened a new chapter in the history of religion.

And it would be difficult to exaggerate the sublimity of the courage with which the *Apocalypse of John* declares that the duel between the Church and the Empire can only end in the triumph of the former, if indeed it has not done so already.

When we consider all these things it is not difficult to see why the title *Inspired* has by common consent been given to these works. The least which could be said about them is that their moral elevation and unique spiritual insight invests them with permanent religious value. The world would quite obviously be the poorer if they had never been written.

The same may be said, though for perhaps somewhat different reasons, of the epistles of the New Testament: especially of those of S. Paul. There is in them a sure grasp of the fundamental principles of Christianity, and a resolute determination to apply them to the whole of life, which has led the whole Christian world to turn to them for guidance.

It is probably impossible to define *Inspiration* exactly, but we can without difficulty show good reasons for counting the prophetic and apostolic writings *Inspired*. But it is less easy to say what the word *Inspired* can mean, or ought to mean, when it is applied to historical writing. What do we mean if we speak of Inspired History? History deals primarily with facts rather than with ideas. If the historian endeavours to use the facts with which he is concerned as a vehicle for certain ideas, he will probably decline considerably from the highest standard of accuracy, and the value of his work to posterity will be impaired. It may be legitimate for him to interpret the facts, so that his reader may be enabled to grasp their real significance, but if such interpretation is carried so far that the facts have to be modified in order to bear it, it becomes illegitimate at that point. The historian's primary concern is to record the facts as accurately as he can.

If we assume that an inspired historian has had facts which could not otherwise have been within his knowledge dictated to him by the Holy Spirit that involves a theory of Inspiration which is, to say the least, difficult to defend. It would be easier to assume that his inspiration equipped him with unusual powers

of observation, and with an abnormally accurate and retentive memory. But this could only apply if he were an eyewitness of the events which he describes. This may apply to the Fourth Gospel—personally I believe that it does—but *ex hypothesi* cannot apply to *Mark* or *Luke*. Neither S. Mark nor S. Luke professes to have been an eyewitness: indeed we are safe in saying that S. Luke could not have been, and for reasons which will be noted below it is impossible to believe that *Matthew* is the work of the apostle whose name it bears, or of an eyewitness of the events with which it deals.

It may be possible to assume that an inspired historian would possess more than normal insight in dealing with the sources of information at his disposal. He might be equipped with infallible judgement as to their value and for deciding between them when discrepancies appeared. But even this theory is not free from formidable difficulties, and can never admit of anything resembling proof. And if it were accepted the inspired historian would still be limited to the sources before him. Nothing which was not contained in them could ever come within his knowledge.

There can be no question as to the permanent value of the first three Gospels, if only because they supply us with information about the Incarnate Life of which we should otherwise be ignorant. Their position as religious classics is unassailable. But it appears to be so difficult, in the light of recent studies, to say in what exact sense they are to be counted Inspired, that this question is better left on one side. Our real concern is rather with investigating their literary history: that is to say, by tracing so far as we can, the way in which they were written, with a view to appreciating their general title to credibility as a whole.

The most superficial reader could not fail to notice that the first three Gospels have much in common. They are quite obviously telling the same story in the same kind of way. Sometimes their agreement is verbally exact, sometimes we are obviously confronted with different versions of the same incident, and the discrepancies which might be expected to arise can be detected. Each has a certain amount of matter peculiar to itself.

For a long time it was considered possible to account for all these phenomena on the basis of oral tradition.[1] The story of our

[1] Oral tradition is said to have played a very large part in the teaching

Lord's Life and a number of His sayings were handed down orally for some years before any attempt to commit them to writing was made. In the course of this process small divergencies would inevitably creep into the story, and these are faithfully reproduced by our evangelists. We have therefore three independent versions of the same tradition, the general credibility of which is attested as strongly as anything can be.

Closer investigation has broken this theory down. It has revealed that the first three Gospels are not independent narratives. Their exact inter-relation is not yet entirely clear: and possibly never will be. The puzzle which it presents has been known to two generations of scholars as *The Synoptic Problem*. It is possible that efforts to find the solution have been impeded by the fact that the problem has never been stated quite correctly.

Minute investigation has proved that both S. Matthew and S. Luke were acquainted with *Mark* and copied considerable extracts from it for part of their narrative. It therefore follows that *Mark* is the oldest Gospel of the three. If it be not the earliest biography of our Lord which was ever attempted, it is the earliest which has come down to us.

This disposes of the possibility that our *Matthew* is the work of the apostle. S. Mark was certainly not an apostle: we cannot even say positively that he was a disciple before the Ascension. No apostle would copy the work of an author whose authority was necessarily inferior to his own.

It appears probable that S. Matthew did write a Gospel[1] which has disappeared. Because it was known to have existed, his name was wrongly attached to our first Gospel. The confusion may have arisen from the fact that the real *Matthew* is said to have been written in Aramaic for Jewish readers, and our *Matthew* appears to have been intended primarily for Jewish readers, as it lays especial emphasis on the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy.[2] This argument would carry comparatively little weight with readers who had not been brought up upon the Hebrew Scrip-

of the Rabbinic schools. The precepts of the great masters were handed down by word of mouth without being committed to writing. This practice no doubt helped to make memories more accurate and retentive than they are among ourselves.

[1] See Appendix A at the end of this chapter, pp. 98 ff.

[2] e.g. 1^{23}, 2^{6}, 2^{18}, 2^{23}, 3^{1}.

tures. This may have led to a belief that it was a translation of the original *Matthew*. This is, however, impossible, for the use which our *Matthew* makes of *Mark* shows that it was originally written in Greek.

Besides *Mark*, both *Matthew* and *Luke* make considerable use of another Greek document commonly known as Q.[1] No copy of this exists now, nor does any early writer profess to have seen one. But that it did exist is certain from the fact that in certain passages in which *Matthew* and *Luke* are not using *Mark* they agree word for word. When two people tell the same story independently they do not use precisely the same words, however close their agreement in substance. Where we find verbal agreement, that proves the existence of a common source. (The only alternative is to postulate an extremely mechanical theory of inspiration, for which there is no warrant, which would, moreover, give rise to a large number of very formidable difficulties.)

Q appears to have consisted of a collection of our Lord's sayings, such as would naturally be required by Christian preachers. The facts of His Life were too well known to all the earliest preachers to need putting on paper. But a collection of His sayings for purposes of reference would always have been convenient, and would soon have become necessary. It is precisely the form which we should expect the earliest Gospel (using the word in the sense which it has acquired) to take.

We cannot, of course, tell whether *Matthew* and *Luke* contain the whole of Q, or whether they incorporated only such parts of it as the authors thought particularly important. Perhaps we may venture to say that in all probability they have not omitted much of it.

There are good reasons for believing that *Mark* is the *Gospel according to S. Peter*, so although not by the hand of an apostle it represents apostolic testimony, and may be regarded as of apostolic authority. But until very recently no one has felt able to say anything about the *provenance* of Q or to make any suggestion as to the authority on which it rests. And both *Matthew* and *Luke* contain some matter peculiar to themselves, and it seemed to be impossible to say anything about the sources from which it might have been derived.

[1] From the German *Quelle* meaning *Source*.

As the story of our Lord's birth is not in *Mark* and cannot be ascribed to Q it appeared to be subject to a certain amount of suspicion. Did it rest on anything more solid than oral tradition, and how strong was the possibility that a considerable element of legend might have made its way into such tradition in the course of seventy years? The possibility that devout imagination has cast a fictitious halo round the birth of Jesus must always be faced. On this theory it amounted almost, if not quite, to a probability.[1]

Accordingly, there has been some tendency amongst scholars to disparage the value of anything contained in *Matthew* or *Luke* which could not be ascribed to *Mark*, or with some reasonable degree of probability to Q. These were regarded as our only really trustworthy sources of information about our Lord's Ministry. What was derived from elsewhere might conceivably be true, but the difficulty of ascribing it to any particular source compelled us to discount its value heavily. We seemed to be compelled to admit that two of our Gospels were not of so high a degree of historical authority as had formerly been supposed.

The most recent study of the subject which has appeared[2] puts forward a somewhat different view. It is still too early to say whether it will be generally accepted or not, but I think that no one who addresses himself to the Synoptic Problem in future will be able to leave it out of account.

Briefly, Dr. Streeter lays stress on the probable existence of local Gospels. These would naturally differ from one another, not only in their language,[3] but to some extent in their selection of incidents and discourses, but no one of them need be accounted for this reason less trustworthy than any of the others.

In a world where books were necessarily few and costly, and the multiplication of copies was a slow process, where, moreover, there was nothing corresponding with the modern newspaper

[1] Our *Matthew* and *Luke* cannot have been written until after the year 65, and may be ten or fifteen years later than that date. There must be nearly seventy years, at least, between our Lord's Nativity and their account of the event.

[2] *The Four Gospels. A Study of Origins*, by B. H. Streeter. (Macmillan, 1924.)

[3] This would be due in part to the necessity which must have arisen very early of translating our Lord's sayings from Aramaic into Greek.

report of events, the only method of acquiring trustworthy information was to resort to the people who were in a position to give it. The majority of these would naturally be found in the more important centres of Christian life, where if it would be too much to say that there was a great Church, at least the Christian Community was more numerous than elsewhere. The more important communities would naturally be visited from time to time by apostles, and would be not unlikely to number some members of the first circle of disciples amongst their permanent residents. They would be the natural head-quarters from which Christian teachers would be sent out, and to which private Christians would apply for information.

In the third quarter of the second century Irenaeus could say confidently—'If you want to know what the teaching of the Church is and always has been, apply to the principal sees. You will find it there, pure and complete, as it has been from the beginning.' What had become a recognized principle before the end of the second century might easily have been a common practice before the middle of the first. If the more important Churches found that they were continually asked for information, they would naturally have set themselves to supply it systematically. Accounts of our Lord's Ministry suitable for putting into the hands of inquirers would have been reduced to writing by, or under the supervision of, people who knew the facts; and in this way primitive Gospels would have come into being. As time went on and the number of those who had seen the Lord diminished, the necessity of making whatever had been put into writing as complete and accurate as possible would begin to be felt. The original 'Gospels' were then incorporated into larger works, and when this had been done separate copies of them would naturally cease to be made.

On this theory *Mark* is to be viewed as the Gospel of the Church of Rome. It would have been circulated as such rather than as the *Gospel according to S. Peter*, although it does in fact represent the teaching of the apostle.

Having said this, we pass from what is virtually certain [1] to the

[1] It seems equally safe to describe *John* as the Gospel of Ephesus. This neither involves nor precludes the belief that it is the work of an eye-witness. See Appendix A, pp. 103 ff.

region of conjecture. Mr. Streeter's suggestion is that Q represents the primitive Gospel of Antioch, the matter peculiar to *Matthew* the Gospel of Jerusalem;[1] and that peculiar to *Luke* the Gospel of Caesarea.

It is obvious that there is a great deal to be said for this theory. It takes account of the actual circumstances of the times, and of the conditions under which books were produced. In discussions of the Synoptic Problems insufficient attention has sometimes been paid to these, and the Evangelists have been treated too much as if they had worked in the editorial office of a modern newspaper, and had exercised their discretion freely as to the final form which a number of divergent or conflicting reports which had been presented to them should assume.

It also does a good deal towards what might be called vindicating the character of Q. Hitherto Q has been somewhat of the nature of an abstraction, as it has stood for no more than the matter common to *Matthew* and *Luke* which is not derived from *Mark*. We can see that there must have been some written source on which they relied, and can, within limits, reconstruct it with a tolerable degree of certainty. If we are to regard the first and third Gospels as trustworthy history, we are bound to place great credence in the source from which a considerable part of their information is derived. And it has therefore always been somewhat disquieting that so little could be said about Q. No one had felt able to hazard a conjecture as to when, where, or by whom it had been composed. It was regarded as a trustworthy authority when S. Matthew and S. Luke were writing, but that is all that could be said. If, however, it may be regarded as the Gospel of Antioch it has the *imprimatur* of a Church with which S. Peter was connected, and where in all probability there were for thirty years or so after the Ascension at least as many people who knew the facts as anywhere else in the world. It acquires if not actually an author's name, at least a local habitation which goes far to justify any degree of historical authority which may be claimed for it.

Moreover, it becomes unnecessary to disparage anything in *Matthew* and *Luke* which cannot be shown to have been derived either from *Mark* or from Q. The Gospels of Jerusalem and Caesarea are not necessarily inferior to those of Rome and Antioch.

[1] This may have been the Aramaic *Matthew* known to Papias.

On this theory S. Matthew and S. Luke appear as methodical and painstaking historians. Each of them had before him the Gospels of Rome and Antioch, which he combined in slightly different ways.[1] Besides these S. Matthew had the Gospel of Jerusalem, and S. Luke that of Caesarea. There is very little room left in their narratives for any vague oral tradition, and as the authorities on which they relied were all of first-class value, the possibility that they have admitted any element of legend into their Gospels becomes very slight indeed.

Just as critical study of the Old Testament has given us a wider conception of the nature and range of Inspiration, because it has shown that the number of writers whose work has come to be regarded as inspired is more than was formerly supposed, so the discovery of a plurality of authorities behind the Gospels—or, if discovery be thought too conclusive a word, the suggestion that there may be a plurality of authorities—is a source of strength rather than weakness, provided that there is reasonable ground for holding that these authorities are themselves trustworthy.

It appears that the Synoptic Gospels present us with the Christian tradition concerning our Lord as it was to be found in the churches of Rome, Antioch, Caesarea, and Jerusalem during the lifetime of those who had had every opportunity of knowing the facts at first hand.[2] *Mark* may be considered to represent oral tradition, but oral tradition of a very definite and peculiarly authoritative kind, as it is the evangelist's reminiscences of the teaching which S. Peter had been accustomed to give in his presence.

The Gospels of Antioch, Caesarea, and Jerusalem had been reduced to writing before they came into the hands of our evangelists, and had obviously acquired a position of considerable authority. Accordingly, the claim of the Synoptic story to be regarded as true history must be regarded as exceptionally good.

[1] 'S. Matthew' seems to have taken *Mark* as his framework and so to have produced what is virtually an enlarged edition of *Mark*. S. Luke seems to have regarded all the documents before him as of equal authority and to have combined them as he thought fit. *Acts* $21^{15, 16}$ and 24^{27} show when he might have had opportunities of becoming familiar with the Gospel of Caesarea.

[2] The reference is to the period when these Gospels may be presumed to have been written. Even when they were used by 'S. Matthew' and S. Luke there were probably some eyewitnesses still to be found.

The weight of authority behind it is —or at least may be—greater than we should naturally have expected. The story is not so complete as we could wish, but it does at least go some way towards accounting for the Christian tradition as it has confronted us in the apostolic writings. If there ever were a man who spoke and acted as Jesus is said to have done, who died upon the Cross as He is said to have died and afterwards showed Himself to be not dead but alive, then it begins—for the first time—to become intelligible how there came to be communities of people at Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, and elsewhere to whom the letters which we possess could have been addressed, and for whom they would have had some meaning.

The most serious criticism which can be brought against the first three Gospels as a whole is that while the story which they tell is very remarkable, it is not quite remarkable enough. The portrait which they draw might be called inadequate, in the sense that there is a real gap between the Prophet of Nazareth and the Christ of the Church. That gap is hardly bridged by His resurrection, and if we had no other portrait of Him the possibility that the Christian estimate of His Person, and of the significance of His work is an exaggerated one, would have to be faced seriously. Fortunately, however, this is not the only portrait of Him which we possess.

The Fourth Gospel transports us into a very different atmosphere. The scene is laid at Jerusalem for the most part instead of in Galilee, and the action is spread over a considerably longer period. The portrait of our Lord which it gives is very different from that given by the earlier evangelists. It would be too much to say that the difference between the two portraits is irreconcilable, but impossible to deny that it is wide. The discourses are of a very different character. There are none of the picturesque parables drawn from the common scenes of everyday life.[1] Our Lord is represented as a baffling and elusive Figure rather than as the Friend of publicans and sinners whom the common people heard gladly, because they could understand what He meant.

Considerations such as these, which must be obvious to any one

[1] The similitude of the Good Shepherd in Chapter X is hardly a parable in the strict sense of the word, though it is so described by the evangelist in v. 6.

who reads the book, have given rise to doubts, which cannot be ignored, as to whether it can be regarded in any sense as True History. Is it a truthful presentation of Jesus as He really was? Do the discourses ascribed to Him represent in any degree words which really fell from His lips? Or ought we to regard the book as a religious romance, a work of edifying fiction comparable with the *Pilgrim's Progress*? There can be no question as to its supreme value to any one who desires to walk in the way of holiness. No student of religious experience, or of the development of Christian thought, can afford to neglect it. But what is its value to the historian whose only purpose is to ascertain as accurately as possible what was really said and done?

These questions cannot be separated from another group relating to the personality of the author. The answers which can be returned to them must be affected by the conclusions which we may reach as to the relationship of the author to the events which he describes. Was he an eyewitness of them? Could he, for example, have heard the discourses of our Lord which fill chapters 14–17 and have written them down from memory in after years? Or when he says *These things spake Jesus* is that merely a dramatic method of showing what the Saviour, whom he had never seen in the days of His flesh, had come to mean to him in his own inner life?

Christian tradition has always ascribed the Gospel to an author of the name of *John* and has been almost unanimous in identifying John the Evangelist with John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee.[1] It has added that the Gospel was written at Ephesus during the last decade of the first century, and that the author died there in extreme old age.

The most definite statement in support of this belief is in a letter written by Irenaeus to his friend Florinus about the year 190. In it he says that in his youth he had personal contact with Polycarp, Bishop of Symrna, who was martyred in the year 156. Polycarp had described in his hearing the intercourse which he had had with John 'and with the rest who had seen the Lord' and had related their words. The impression left on Irenaeus' mind was that by *John* Polycarp meant the apostle and the author of the Fourth Gospel.

[1] For some of the evidence on this point see Appendix A at the end of this chapter, p. 104.

It is very difficult to set this piece of testimony aside. Polycarp must have known to whom he was referring, and it is not easy to see how Irenaeus could have misunderstood him. Of course a good deal depends upon how close the intercourse between them had been.

Dr. Streeter, who thinks that Irenaeus did make a mistake[1] as to what Polycarp had really said, suggests that as a boy he heard the Bishop preach once or twice, and that what he wrote to Florinus nearly forty years afterwards had no more solid foundation than his recollection of these sermons.

But as we do not know exactly when Irenaeus was born, we cannot say positively that he was hardly more than a child when he saw and heard Polycarp. He may have been the Bishop's pupil, and have received regular instruction from him for a considerable period. If this were so it is hardly conceivable that he should have confused the different Johns about whom Polycarp may have spoken.

Polycarp must have been born in 70, as he appears to have been eighty-six years of age at the time of his death. He cannot therefore have met many people who had seen the Lord: and the fact that he seems to distinguish between John and 'the rest' suggests that John was a figure of exceptional importance. It would be difficult to separate John from 'the rest' in this kind of way unless John were an apostle: possibly, we might perhaps say probably, the only apostle whom Polycarp had ever met.

It has been suggested that this John was not the apostle but 'the Elder' to whom Papias appears to refer. But the existence of this personage can hardly be said to be more than an hypothesis, which serves the immediate purpose of providing an author for the 2nd and 3rd epistles of John. It is true that the somewhat pointed signature *The Elder* suggests that the author wished to distinguish himself from a namesake with whom he might otherwise have been confused. On the other hand, we cannot say positively that it could not have been used of himself by a man who was also an apostle, if he were by that time acting as permanent head of a local church. In the locality his official position might have been that of Elder, and the tone of the two letters suggests

[1] *The Four Gospels*, pp. 443 et sqq.

that it was his official authority which he desired to assert at the moment.[1]

Dr. Streeter thinks that these two epistles are by the same hand as the first, which is indisputably by the author of the Gospel. He would therefore ascribe all four books to the Elder, and concludes that he was the John to whom Polycarp referred, and that Irenaeus misunderstood him. The Elder had been a disciple of John the Apostle, so that the contents of the Gospel are to some extent derived from him. The Apostle is the Beloved Disciple: but that is not his own description of himself. It is the title which was given to him by the Elder some thirty years after his death.

Dr. Streeter further suggests that the Elder had only seen the Lord in the sense that he had perhaps as a child been an eyewitness of the Crucifixion.[2]

But this seems to be irreconcilable with the very emphatic opening words of the first Epistle: unless we assume that they are a mere reproduction of what the Elder had heard the Apostle say. If they are the Elder's own he must have been a personal disciple who had had real knowledge of our Lord during the days of His Flesh.

Moreover, if the Elder had not been a Disciple, but merely a spectator, and at the moment an incurious spectator, of the Crucifixion, it is difficult to see why this should have invested him with authority such as Polycarp evidently attached to him, and such as is clearly claimed for himself by the author of the Gospel and the First Epistle.[3]

To me Dr. Streeter's theory raises ultimately more difficulties than it solves. The external evidence that John the Apostle and John the Evangelist were the same person is very strong indeed. If John the Elder is to be distinguished from him, it follows that the 2nd and 3rd epistles are not by the author of the 1st. It is

1 At an earlier date the Presbyters were the stationary heads of local churches and the Apostles held a 'roving commission'. But we cannot say positively that this arrangement was still in force in the last decade of the century when there was only one apostle left alive.

2 p. 456.

3 The author of the 2nd and 3rd Epistles writes with authority. But it is not authority based on unique personal knowledge of our Lord. He writes by virtue of his position in the Church, as a Bishop might write to-day.

sometimes argued that all three epistles must be by the same hand, because the 2nd and 3rd are so entirely Johannine in their thought and phraseology. But their brevity makes it difficult to rely on that argument with complete confidence. The author might have displayed more originality if he had written at greater length. It is also conceivable, as Dr. Streeter suggests, that the Elder had been a disciple of the Apostle, and reproduced in his own short letters the style and thought of his master more closely than he would have done if he had known him only through the perusal of his works.

If external evidence points to the Apostle as the author of the Gospel, certain features in the Gospel itself present serious objections to that view.

In the first place the Apostle's home was in Galilee, and even if he had occasion to visit Jerusalem at frequent intervals his calling must have compelled him to spend a large part of his time in the north. Yet in his eyes the Galilean ministry is of less importance than events at Jerusalem. It is possible that he is concerned primarily with an earlier ministry which had ended in failure before the work in Galilee had been begun, or that he thought it unnecessary to dwell on what had been treated adequately by Mark, Matthew, and Luke. But it is obvious that his main interest is not where we should naturally have expected to find it if he were the son of Zebedee.

Secondly: It is not easy to see how he could have known what had passed at a meeting of the Sanhedrin unless he had been present himself, or had at least been on intimate terms with some member of that body.[1]

Moreover, if he were present at the interview between our Lord and the Woman of Samaria, he appears to distinguish himself from *the disciples*,[2] and if he were not present it is hard to explain how the episode can have come to his knowledge.

Thirdly: If by *another disciple*[3] the author means himself (which seems to be the natural interpretation to put upon the passage), a very formidable difficulty arises. How could a Galilean

[1] 11^{47-53}. Even when allowance is made for the ancient practice of dramatizing an historian's summary of the situation these verses read as if they were at least based on an actual report of what was really said.

[2] $4^{8,27}$.

[3] 18^{15-17}.

fisherman, even if his father were a man of some substance, have been on such terms either with the High Priest or with his servants as are implied here? For this disciple could not only enter the palace at will, but could bring with him any friend he chose on an occasion when common sense tells us that stringent orders must have been given not to admit all and sundry.

Fourthly: If by *the disciple whom Jesus loved* the author means himself, it is clear that his home was in or near Jerusalem.[1]

It is sometimes argued that no man could have ventured to give this title to himself, and therefore that the *Beloved Disciple* and the author of the Gospel cannot be the same person. Dr. Streeter thinks that it might have been given to the Apostle by the Elder, and may therefore be regarded as an additional indication that the Elder was the Evangelist, and that John the Apostle was the source of his information.

It does not, however, appear to me to be inconceivable that if the title had been commonly given by others for half a century or more, the Apostle might have used it of himself when he had become the last survivor of his generation, in order to make his identity perfectly clear. He might have contemplated readers to whom *John the Apostle* would be an entirely unfamiliar personage, whereas they had heard of the *Disciple whom Jesus loved* all their lives, whether they had ever set eyes on him or not.

Lastly: There are the very perplexing verses at the end of Chapter 21, with their sudden transition from the third person, which has been maintained throughout the book, to the first.

If the words *This is the disciple which beareth witness of these things and wrote these things* are not intended to identify the author of the Gospel with the Beloved Disciple to whom explicit reference has just been made, they appear to be misleading, and have been misunderstood. No other reasonably convincing interpretation of them has yet been suggested. But then who are *We?* If by this is meant the elders of the Church at Ephesus, they were not in a position to check the accuracy of what the author had written, because he appears to have been the last person left who had first-hand knowledge of the facts. The most they could say was that what he had written was consonant with what they had

[1] 19^{26-7}. The Virgin Mary is expressly stated to have been at Jerusalem a few weeks later. *Acts* 1.

often heard him say before. The statement *We know that his witness is true* appears to be an exaggeration if it mean no more than that they were acting like the modern witnesses to a will, i.e. certifying that the reputed author of the document had declared that it contained what he really wished to say.

And who is the I of *I suppose* in verse 25? Is he merely some late copyist who appended what he regarded as a pious observation when he had completed his task? Or is he the author's amanuensis, who actually held the pen when the Gospel was composed, perhaps because an old man's fingers had grown stiff and his eyes dim?

It is possible, perhaps probable, that the two verses are a late addition. In any case their purpose seems to have been to prevent or allay doubts as to the credibility of the author.[1]

The arguments for and against the identification of the Apostle with the Evangelist are so evenly balanced that either hypothesis must be considered to be reasonably tenable. It is probable that certainty will never be within our reach.

If we ascribe the Gospel to some one other than the Apostle John, this does not necessarily mean that it is not the work of an eyewitness.

The author is described correctly as a Mystic, which means roughly that he had a contemplative mind and an unusually vivid sense of the reality of the spiritual world. He was capable of pondering on the spiritual significance of what he saw and heard, and of interpreting events in the light of their relation to a spiritual reality, which was more apparent to him than to the majority of mankind.

Minds of this type are never very common, especially in our part of the world. We are apt to find them unintelligible, and therefore to regard them with a measure of contempt, which is not really justifiable. Writers on the Fourth Gospel appear to assume, almost invariably, that if S. John is to be described as a Mystic (which is indisputable), it follows that he has depicted our Lord

[1] There are two obvious grounds on which these might have arisen. Either at the time, because it was known that the author had no first-hand knowledge, and because he had said nothing about the source of his information. Or subsequently, if it were thought to be virtually impossible that any one who had first-hand knowledge could have lived to a date so late as that at which the Gospel was known to have appeared.

not as He really was but as his own devout imagination had idealized Him fifty years or more after the Ascension.

But those who wish to discount the historical value of the Fourth Gospel usually appear to ignore certain considerations which are not unimportant.

In the first place its chronology is much more definite than that of the other three. They can hardly be said to possess any chronology at all. But in S. John's mind there is a fairly definite sequence of events which he tries to present to his readers. We may feel disposed to question its accuracy: but it is there.

The following examples will illustrate the point sufficiently:

1. On the morrow he seeth Jesus coming unto him. 1^{29}.
2. Again on the morrow John was standing. 1^{35}.
3. On the morrow He was minded to go forth into Galilee. 1^{43}.
4. And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee. 2^{1}.
5. And the Passover of the Jews was at hand. 2^{13}.
6. And after the two days He went forth from thence into Galilee. 4^{43}.
7. And after these things there was a feast of the Jews. 5^{1}.
8. But when it was now the midst of the feast. 7^{14}.
9. Now on the last day, the great day of the feast. 7^{37}.
10. And it was the feast of the dedication at Jerusalem: it was winter. 10^{22}.
11. He abode at that time two days in the place where He was. 11^{6}.
12. And after eight days again His disciples were within. 20^{26}.

If we choose to dismiss all these dates as fictitious, no argument is possible. But as they stand they suggest that the author was by no means a vague or forgetful person, and that he took particular pains to make his narrative as accurate as he could. The possibility that he inserted them because he knew them to be correct cannot be overlooked.

In other respects also he appears to have possessed an unusually strong sense of fact. Again and again he records details which are of no intrinsic importance, but are exactly the kind of thing which an eyewitness who possessed a retentive memory would never forget. When he was recalling, years afterwards, the scenes which he wished to describe on paper, these details would stand out clearly in his mind. It is, in fact, a not uncommon experience that when

great events are in progress (e.g. in the heat of a battle) entirely trivial incidents lodge themselves firmly in the minds of those who are taking part, and are remembered vividly many years afterwards, even if the outline of what was in reality far more important has become somewhat blurred.

The following examples will illustrate the point sufficiently.

1. When thou wast under the fig tree I saw thee. 1^{48}.

2. Now there were six waterpots of stone . . . containing two or three firkins apiece . . . and they filled them up to the brim. 2^{6-8}.

3. So the woman left her waterpot. 4^{28}.

4. A pool . . . having five porches. 5^{2}.

5. When therefore they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs.[1] 6^{19}.

6. Full of great fishes, a hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, the net was not rent. 21^{11}.

It may be possible to discover some profound allegorical significance in these simple statements. I believe it has been argued that the ancients believed that there were 153 species of fish in the world, and from this it follows that the net is an allegory of the Church, which was to draw its members from every race of mankind. This interpretation of the passage (which presumably entails the assumption that the story has no foundation in fact) does not, perhaps, admit of disproof. But the possibility that the evangelist was standing by when a real net was drawn up on a real beach, and counted the fish which it contained and made the total 153, cannot be dismissed as entirely negligible.

If we choose to assert that the impression which Jesus made on the peasants and fisher-folk of Galilee was the only impression which He could have made on anybody, and that He could never have said anything except the things which they remembered,[2] we must dismiss the Fourth Gospel as romance rather than history. But the assertion is arbitrary, and as has been suggested above seems to create a number of very formidable difficulties.

[1] The Greek word is *stadion* which was a measure of just over 200 yards English. From time immemorial 200 yards has been a cable's length all the world over, and is the unit of measurement habitually employed by seafaring men for reckoning short distances.

[2] *S. Matt.* 11^{25-30} must not, however, be overlooked. If these words were a detached fragment we could hardly question their genuineness, and should certainly assign them to the Fourth Gospel rather than to the First.

Was His Life really sufficient to account for the phenomenon of the Apostolic Church as revealed to us in the Epistles? Could the astonishing, subversive, and all but incredible Christian tradition have been built on that foundation, and upon no other?

A man of very different mental calibre, possibly of very different antecedents, would look at Him with very different eyes. He might note much which simpler people had overlooked, and remember many things which had made no impression on their minds. The portrait which he drew of his Master might owe something to him, just as an artist of genius must 'interpret' his sitter to some extent. But a portrait which owed something to the interpretation of a genius might be a more life-like presentation of the original than any other.

For my own part, I believe this to be true of the Fourth Gospel. If we cannot identify the evangelist with certainty I do not think we can dispute his claim, which is repeated with particular emphasis in the opening words of the First Epistle, to have been an eyewitness of the events which he describes. Positive proof is beyond our reach, and perhaps ought not to be desired. But it is at least possible that his portrait of our Lord is the most accurate and trustworthy which we can ever possess, and that when he dared to write *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*, he had found the solution of what would otherwise have been an insoluble mystery, and was stating a truth which no one but himself had been able to grasp.

If we accept the Gospel story, including S. John's version, as a whole, then the Christian tradition which appears in the apostolic writings, and has continued from that day to this, becomes rational and intelligible. If Jesus really were as the Gospels represent Him, the Christian estimate of the unique significance of His Person and Work need not—indeed cannot—be dismissed as exaggeration. Probably it would be a truer criticism to say that it has never yet been entirely adequate. The fact that the story, if true, would account for much which must otherwise remain entirely baffling is a very powerful argument in its favour: an argument, moreover, whose weight does not seem to be as a rule fully appreciated.

The Gospel story cannot be considered fairly apart from its consequences. We are bound to take them into account when

trying to form an estimate as to its historic credibility. Neither can it be divorced from its antecedents. The Incarnation is not presented to us as if it were something which had fallen suddenly and unexpectedly from heaven, as some strange objects of heathen worship were fabled to have done.[1] It is always treated as the climax of a long development, which ought to have been foreseen, though in fact it was not, and this fact was regarded as a most important element in its claim upon the allegiance of mankind. The speeches of S. Peter in the early chapters of *Acts* are sufficient illustration of this. They are not, of course, to be regarded as exact reports of what was actually said, such as we are accustomed to read in the daily press, but there is no doubt that they reflect faithfully the tenor of the earliest Christian preaching, and exhibit the line of argument in which most reliance was placed.

We find a similar train of thought, preserved in more detail, in the First and Fourth Gospels.

In *S. Matt.* 1^{23} the birth of Christ is said to have taken place as it did in order that a prediction made by Isaiah more than seven centuries earlier might be fulfilled. In 2^{6} the scene of His birth is regarded as having been necessarily at Bethlehem in order to fulfil a prediction which had been made by Micah, that a governor of Israel should arise from that place. In 2^{15} the Flight into Egypt is represented as a fulfilment of a prediction of Hosea, and in 2^{18} the Massacre of the Innocents is described as a fulfilment of a saying of Jeremiah.

There can be no doubt that in the mind of the author of this Gospel, the fact that these passages from the Old Testament could be applied to events in the Life of Christ was an important argument, and we may assume that he knew that it would appeal to his readers.

But the modern reader can hardly fail to notice that in three instances at least, if not in all four, the prediction on which such stress is laid assumes a different significance when examined in its original setting. The point of Isaiah's prophecy is that before a child not yet born has reached years of discretion, the invasion of the land will be a thing of the past.[2]

[1] e. g. The *ancile* or sacred shield of Mars which was carefully preserved at Rome, and the image of Artemis at Ephesus. (*Acts* 19^{35}). The latter was probably an aerolite.

[2] *Isa.* 7^{1-17}.

It may not be certain exactly what Micah had in mind: but it is at least possible that he hoped for the appearance of the Governor of whom he spoke in his own day.[1]

The passage of Hosea—*When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt*[2]—was certainly intended to bear an entirely different significance. He was not thinking of any possible future event, but of the past. The reference is to the Exodus from Egypt, which was already ancient history, and was the outstanding instance of God's care for His people. The whole of Hosea's argument would fall to the ground unless he were understood to be referring to a well-known historical event.

The passage of Jeremiah[3] relates to the capture of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans and to the captivity of the people. The original ends with a prediction of ultimate restoration—*And there is hope for thy latter end, saith the Lord; and thy children shall come again to thine own border*, which is a testimony to the invincible faith and courage of the prophet who could see a ray of hope even in the hour of overwhelming disaster.

These words are omitted by the evangelist, as no ingenuity could adapt them to the Massacre of the Innocents: as he also omits the close of Isaiah's prophecy.

It is obvious that these passages to which S. Matthew appeals do not represent a fulfilment of prophecy in any sense which we can regard as natural or even legitimate. All that can be said is that there are passages in the Old Testament which, if quoted without reference to the original context, can be applied with apparent appropriateness to the Life of Christ. It would be difficult to maintain that the authors of these passages consciously foresaw these events in any way: it is certain that when they wrote, the meaning which, primarily at least, they wished to convey bore no relation to that which the Evangelist reads into them, and it therefore follows that the argument on which he and his readers seem to have laid great stress is in reality of no force. This does not necessarily affect our belief that the incidents narrated are true history, but for my own part I find it impossible to accept his contention—It was bound to happen so, because it had been foretold.

The same must be said of S. John's account of the Crucifixion.

[1] *Mic.* 5^{2-9}. [2] 11^{1}. [3] *Jer.* 31^{15-17}.

He represents the method by which our Lord's garments were divided amongst the soldiers who were in charge of the execution, and the fact that His side was pierced with a spear and that His legs were not broken, as inevitable because they were fulfilments of prophecy.[1]

It is, however, very difficult to attach any special significance to these incidents, or to assume that our redemption would have been affected in any way if they had not taken place as they did. They seem to be, if we may so say, hardly worth prophesying. To us it appears more natural to assume that when the evangelist witnessed them passages from the Old Testament which could be applied to them rose in his mind, just as an apt quotation may occur to us in a connexion which could never have been contemplated by the author.

We seem to be compelled to conclude that an argument on which the first Christians laid the greatest emphasis cannot in reality carry as much weight as they imagined.

They appear to have thought that the future—or at least that part of it which directly concerns the Life of Christ—was unrolled before the eyes of the prophetic writers of the Old Testament, much as the map of an unvisited country can be unrolled before our own. What the prophets said had, in many instances, no relation whatever to the events of their own day, and conveyed no meaning which any one who heard them could understand. In fact at the moment it had no meaning. It acquired one for the first time centuries afterwards in entirely different surroundings.

This theory of prophecy involves a conception of the nature of Inspiration which is not free from difficulties. It also raises far-reaching problems as to the relation between Divine foreknowledge and human free-will, and goes far towards diminishing the moral value of our Lord's Life, inasmuch as it assumes Him to have followed a path which had been unalterably prescribed before-hand. Even if it can be maintained in the face of these objections its value has always seemed to me to be slight.

It would be beside our present purpose to embark on any general discussion as to the precise extent and nature of the predictive element in Hebrew prophecy. It will be sufficient to say that the interpretation which was put upon it by the evangelists,

[1] 19^{24}, ^{36}, ^{37}.

and, generally, by the first two generations of Christians is not easy to defend. There can be no question that the Life of Christ is to be regarded as the legitimate culmination of the religious history of the Jews, but modern readers of the Bible will probably prefer to relate that culmination to certain general principles rather than to particular events.

Briefly: If we take the Old Testament as a whole we can trace in it the rise and development of certain religious ideas.

First: Belief in the Unity of God. In Jewish thought the primitive belief in a number of gods of whom one maintained a somewhat doubtful primacy over a rebellious family or semi-independent hierarchy, was gradually displaced by the conviction that God is One, and that He reigns supreme in heaven and earth without a possible rival of any kind.[1]

Secondly: Belief that God has a righteous and intelligible purpose for mankind which can be traced in the course of human history. The course of history is not arbitrary, but a continuously expanding revelation of the righteousness of God. The righteousness is manifested in disaster no less than in triumph, because when disaster comes upon God's chosen it is the punishment which has been merited by their sins.[2]

Thirdly: Belief that the righteousness of God demands what may be called a corresponding righteousness on the part of man. Religion does not begin and end with the performance of prescribed ceremonies which are of supreme importance for their own sake. It is intended to affect personal conduct, and the conduct of nations no less than of individuals. The purpose of religious ceremonies is to produce some sort of moral correspondence between man and God. If they fail to do this and come to be regarded as ends in themselves, they are merely mischievous, however venerable the sanctions on which they rest.[3]

Fourthly: Belief that the only motive which inspires all God's dealings with man is Love. God's ways may often be mysterious, and for the moment all but incomprehensible. His judgements may be severe, but behind whatever happens is His Love for His creatures.[4]

[1] e.g. *Zech.* 14^{9}. A late passage.
[2] e.g. *Isa.* 37^{5-36}, 42^{24-5}.
[3] e.g. *Isa.* 1^{10-20}.
[4] e.g. *Hos.* 6^{1-3}. An early passage. *Jer.* 31^{3}.

Naturally ideas such as these were slow to make their way. They had to be, as it were, ground into the religious consciousness of the Jews by hard and bitter experience. No nation has ever had a more disastrous political history. But eventually the prophetic teaching triumphed, and played a very important part in moulding the religion of the Jewish people.[1]

It is not too much to say that these beliefs are the very foundation of everything which we understand by Religion now. We accept them as a matter of course: perhaps without realizing fully the source whence they have been derived. There is no form of theism[2] which has the least prospect of being accepted on any considerable scale by the world to-day, which is not rooted and grounded in the teaching of the Hebrew prophets. The only really serious omission is the life of the world to come. There is singularly little about this in the Old Testament, though it appears distinctly in the Apocrypha.[3] In our Lord's time it was denied by the Sadducees, whose right to be members of the Jewish Church was not in dispute.[4]

No men have ever used more exalted language about the majesty of God than did the Hebrew prophets: none have ever been more profoundly conscious of the moral gulf between man and his Maker. Yet, at the same time, they dare to bring God into the closest contact with this world. They regard Him as directly controlling all that happens here, and, if we may say so, as profoundly interested in the hopes and fears, the successes and disappointments of humanity. They are persuaded that there are no lengths to which He is not prepared to go to win the love and loyalty of His own creatures.

The Hebrew prophets were the first people to formulate what may be called a Philosophy of History. They looked at history in one particular way. In their eyes it was not an inconsequent series of unintelligible and purposeless happenings, but a coherent and rational process, inasmuch as it revealed, with ever increasing clearness, the Character of God. In their earlier days the out-

[1] A large, and in some respects less admirable, part was played by the Law. Whatever the origin of the Law may have been, its development was not uninfluenced by the prophets.

[2] Including even Islam.

[3] e.g. *Wisd. of Sol.* 3¹⁻⁹. *2Macc.* 12⁴³⁻⁵.

[4] e.g. *Acts* 23⁸.

standing event whereby He had made Himself known was the Exodus. That displayed as nothing else could have done His love for Israel and His power to make His love effective. It proved that the Covenant with Abraham was not an illusion. Afterwards a time came when, as Jeremiah foresaw,[1] even the deliverance from Egypt was to some extent overshadowed by the still more marvellous deliverance from the Babylonian captivity, which enabled Jerusalem to be rebuilt and the national life, which had been ended by the catastrophes of 597 and 586,[2] to be resumed. Thus the belief became firmly rooted in the minds of the Jews that whatever God had done for them in the past was less than what He was preparing to do in the future. No accumulation of calamity could ever crush this hope, and although the forms which it assumed were sometimes fantastic, it kept faith alive in times of trouble. Its religious value can hardly be exaggerated.

Unfortunately it came to be generally interpreted in one particular way. It was understood to mean that God would give His people political independence (which in fact they have never enjoyed since the capture of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans), and not only that but empire over their ancient enemies, if not over the entire world. The deliverer whom God would send would set up his throne at Jerusalem and reign there over a dominion whose extent and splendour would far exceed even the legendary glories of Solomon. This belief inspired the Jews with a fanatical obstinacy and led them to make four furious bids for political independence, by force of arms. The last three were against the Romans. Each achieved a brief measure of success and ended in overwhelming disaster. Since the year A.D. 132 no Jewish army has ever taken the field, and the Jews have possessed no land which they could call their own. But the catastrophe was not the inevitable or even legitimate outcome of the hope: it was due to the fact that the hope was degraded by an arrogant and narrow nationalism.

What was, or could have been, the legitimate outcome of the teaching of the prophets? They held, as we have seen, that God is One and Righteous: that He does not hold Himself aloof from this world, but takes an ever-increasing part in its affairs. The motive behind all His actions is love, and there are no lengths to which

[1] 23[7-8].

[2] 2 *Kings* 24, 25.

that love may not go. He has wrought wondrously in the past, but will do even greater things in the future. Are we to dismiss all these convictions and hopes as an idle dream which has no real relation to actual facts, and therefore never could have had any real fulfilment? And if we say that, what place remains for anything which we understand by Religion? What place, indeed, is left for any view of life other than the atheistic pessimism of the Buddha, which despairs of the whole world of sense and knows nothing of any purpose which can be fulfilled in time?

If, on the contrary, we say that these convictions and hopes are not idle, because they are of God, and for that reason cannot fail of their fulfilment, where is that fulfilment to be found? It did not come as the Jews anticipated, and there is probably no one now who would maintain that their dream of empire will ever be realized. But if the Gospel story be true history, does not that furnish a fulfilment far transcending anything which could have been imagined? If there ever were a Man who lived as the Hero of the Gospel is represented to have lived, if the interpretation put upon His Life by the Fourth Evangelist be the true one, so that it furnishes a key to what would otherwise remain an insoluble enigma, then has not all, and more than all, that the Hebrew prophets believed and hoped of God been translated into fact before the eyes of men?

The prophets foretold Him in very truth, not because they definitely predicted the details of His Life, but because they launched into the world a conception of God and of His relation to mankind which could not have been fulfilled adequately by a Life of any other kind. How far they consciously foresaw such a Life does not immediately concern us. The point is that what they said demanded such a Life to reach its full fruition. As we trace the growth of the Jewish religion we may say that it comes out *as a stream from a river, and as a conduit into a garden . . . and lo my stream became a river.*[1] But without the Gospel story we must stop there. We cannot continue *and my river became a sea*, but must admit that it comes to an abrupt and inexplicable end. It is swallowed up in the sands of rabbinic pedantry. The Gospel story does not only account for the sudden appearance of the astonishing Christian Tradition in which the

[1] *Ecclus.* 24^{30}.

Church has lived from that day to this. It also gives rational coherence to a prolonged and hardly less remarkable development of religion which had preceded it. It may be compared with the keystone of an arch. Coming where it does it fits into place, and we cannot conceive a stone of any other shape which could fill the gap. Without it the Jewish Church has no end but failure, and the Christian Church no intelligible beginning of any kind. With it two disconnected fragments become the component parts of a solid and harmonious structure whose whole character is a tribute to the wisdom of the architect.

To drop the language of metaphor—The Gospel story makes intelligible so much both in earlier and subsequent history which is inexplicable without it, that we are compelled to approach it with a presumption that it is what it professes to be, namely, true history.

There is only one ground on which it could be dismissed as wholly, or almost wholly untrustworthy, and that is on the strength of the miracles which it records. If we choose to assert that miracles cannot happen, then we are bound to assume that a very large element of legend has made its way into the Gospel, and it becomes the duty of the historian to endeavour to disentangle the real lineaments of the historical Jesus from the cloud with which well-meaning but mistaken piety has enveloped them.

Attempts to disentangle a non-miraculous Jesus from the portrait drawn in the Gospel were made more than once during the last century. They were not very successful and are probably unlikely to be repeated. They entail a method of handling the documents which has no title to be regarded as scientific criticism.

It is noteworthy that no miracle was ever ascribed to John the Baptist. Yet he was a striking figure and produced a deep impression on all who saw and heard him. If we think that any considerable element of legend has made its way into the life of Jesus, it follows that He must have impressed His contemporaries as John never did.

But to assume that miracles[1] cannot happen, and that therefore

[1] It might be rash to attempt a definition of Miracles. But a rough description would be: interference with the working of apparently inevitable laws by means of personal action. Within limits this possibility is a common fact of experience, and we are hardly in a position to say that the limits with which we are familiar are incapable of extension.

any narrative which records them as having happened is necessarily untrustworthy, involves certain further assumptions which are, to say the least, open to question. It means that we regard the world of sense as a closed system into which nothing of the nature of an intrusion is possible. That might conceivably be true, but we cannot consider that we have proved it if we choose to dismiss as untrustworthy any evidence which appears to justify a different view.

Any detailed discussion of miracles would be out of place here. But it is worth noting that the miracles of the New Testament are in reality very few in number. They involve what may be called a *minimum* of interference with 'natural laws', and are undertaken for a definite moral purpose of the highest character. They fall into place as part of a coherent and intelligible moral revelation, and cannot be considered fairly apart from it.

In all these respects they contrast very sharply with the miracles of the apocryphal Gospels and Acts. More will be said about this in a later chapter.

Finally: We are arriving at a juster estimate than was common a couple of generations ago of the powers and resources of human personality. The mechanical inventions and scientific discoveries of the nineteenth century seem for a time to have proved somewhat dazzling, and to have led to a conception of the universe which is at variance with the facts. We are more ready now than were the majority of those who attended the Great Exhibition of 1851 to allow for an incalculable personal factor which may upset conclusions which on paper appear to be irrefragable.

Some of the victories attributed to Napoleon I are theoretically inconceivable, because the material odds were enormously against him. But no one doubts that they were gained, and that the decisive factor which accomplished the apparently impossible was his personality. If the personality of a great soldier can work what might almost be described as miracles, how much greater must we naturally expect to find the potency of the Word made Flesh in accomplishing what was needful for the completeness and coherence of the revelation of God which it was His to bring to mankind.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER IV

Early Traditions relating to the Evangelists and their Writings.

THE first attempt to write a complete history of the Church was made by Eusebius, who was Bishop of Caesarea from about 314 until his death, which occurred shortly before 341.

His *Ecclesiastical History* is in eight books and gives the impression of being the work of a careful, methodical, and painstaking writer. He usually mentions his authorities, and not infrequently quotes them in full. The value of his history is enhanced by the fact that he had access to the complete works of three very eminent and learned men whose writings have not come down to us in complete form—Irenaeus who became Bishop of Lyons in 177, Clement who taught and wrote at Alexandria between the years 190–203, and Clement's pupil Origen. He also quotes Papias, though his knowledge of him appears to have been derived from quotations by other writers.

Papias was Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia between the years 120 and 140. He had never met any one who had seen the Lord, but he had met people who had known apostles and other Christians of the first generation. From them he collected what information he could, chiefly of a personal and anecdotal character. Irenaeus says that he had been a *hearer of John*, but this must be either a slip, or else the John in question cannot have been the apostle. Papias speaks of having known a John, whom he calls *The Elder*, and appears to distinguish between him and John the Apostle. Eusebius found this perplexing, and no subsequent historian has been able to arrive at any very definite conclusion as to the identity of *The Elder*, and his relation (if any) to any of the books in the New Testament which are ascribed to *John*. Eusebius's statements about the Evangelists are as follows:

A. 1. 'Matthew preached first to the Hebrews. When about to go to others he committed the Gospel which bears his name to writing in his native language.'[1]

2. 'Matthew wrote the sayings in the Hebrew dialect,[2] and every one interpreted them as best he could.'[3]

[1] *H. E.* iii. 24, quoting Clement.
[2] i.e. Aramaic. The vernacular of Palestine in our Lord's day.
[3] *H. E.* iii. 39, quoting Papias.

3. 'Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew characters for converts from Judaism.'[1]

4. 'Matthew wrote his Gospel amongst the Hebrews in their own language, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome and laying the foundations of the Church.'[2]

It is impossible to identify this work with our first Gospel. Our *Matthew* is not a translation, but was written in Greek. Its only point of contact with this Gospel is that it appears to have been intended primarily for Jewish readers. It is just possible that this may have caused Matthew's name to be attached to it when the real *Matthew* had disappeared.

Papias' statement is perplexing, and admits of more than one interpretation. It may mean that Matthew made a collection of the sayings of our Lord in the Aramaic in which they were delivered, and that there was no 'authorized' translation of them. When the Church spread into the Greek-speaking world, every Christian preacher who used the book made his own translation It is, however, possible that by the word which I have translated by *sayings* is meant *Oracles*: i.e. not words spoken by our Lord, but passages from the Old Testament which might be considered to refer to Him, and that it was left to the individual to show their application. The earliest Christian preaching seems to have laid much stress on the fulfilment of prophecy, so that a short collection of the principal texts to which reference would naturally be made, would have been extremely useful. On the view that Papias meant discourses delivered by our Lord, attempts have been made to discover what he understood by S. Matthew's Gospel embedded in our *Matthew*. They do not seem to me to have been successful.

5. 'Pantaenus is said to have gone as far as India, and to have found there on his arrival Christians, to whom Bartholomew had preached, in possession of the Gospel according to *Matthew*.'[3]

Pantaenus was one of the great teachers of Alexandria, and appears to have flourished there about A.D. 180. If we can accept

[1] *H. E.* vi. 25, quoting Origen. This does not necessarily imply that the Gospel was in the Aramaic *language*. Origen himself made a copy of the Hebrew Old Testament in Greek characters.

[2] *H. E.* v. 8, quoting Irenaeus. This would make S. Matthew's Gospel contemporary with or even prior to S. Mark's. Our Matthew makes use of Mark and therefore must be later.

[3] *H. E.* v. 10. Eusebius does not say from what source he derived this statement, and gives it with some reserve. Pantaenus may have been of sufficient eminence for his doings to have been a matter of common knowledge.

this statement it shows that there must have been at least one copy of the original *Matthew* in existence in some out-of-the-way part of the Christian world at the end of the second century. By that time it had certainly been displaced by our *Matthew* in all the important centres.

It is difficult to say exactly what is meant by *India*. Greeks used the word loosely to signify any unknown country which might be reached by going down the Red Sea. It is hard to believe that there could have been a community in what we mean by India, to whom an Aramaic Gospel would have been of any use, and perhaps unlikely that either Bartholomew or Pantaenus should have got so far. Either some part of Arabia or of what we call Somaliland is probably what is meant, and the existence of a Jewish colony there is, perhaps, not inconceivable.

Pantaenus is said to have become a Christian comparatively late in life, and if the journey were made before his conversion, when he appears to have been a travelling philosopher, his statements about a Christian document need not be worth much. If he had come upon a Christian community in some unexpected place, who possessed a Gospel of some kind, he would not have been in a position to estimate its character for himself or to test the accuracy of anything which they told him about it.

Eusebius also records[1] that Symmachus, the leader of a Judaizing sect who held that Christ was the son of Joseph and *mere man*, objected to Matthew's Gospel. This looks as if the book with which he found fault contained some story of the Virgin-Birth, which points in the direction of our *Matthew*, or at least in the direction of something more than a collection of our Lord's sayings. On the other hand, a collection of Messianic prophecies would no doubt have included *Isaiah* 7^{14}, and this might have provoked Symmachus's displeasure.

The relation between the Gospel which Matthew the apostle was believed to have written, our *Matthew*, and *The Gospel according to the Hebrews*,[2] is at present an unsolved problem.

B. 1. 'So great was the light of piety which shone upon the minds of those who heard Peter, that they could not be satisfied with hearing him once, nor with the unwritten teaching of the divine preaching. They besought Mark, whose the Gospel is said to be, as he was Peter's attendant, to ask him to leave them a written record of what they had been taught by word of mouth.

[1] *H. E.* vi. 17, quoting Origen.
[2] See Chapter VI, pp. 149–51.

At first Peter would neither allow nor forbid this.[1] In this way they became responsible for the writing of what is called S. Mark's[2] Gospel. And they say that when the Apostle knew what had been done, the Spirit having revealed it to him, he was delighted with their zeal and ratified the book for reading in Church.'[3]

2. 'And they say that this Mark was the first to go to Egypt, and to preach the Gospel which he wrote, and was the founder of the Church of Alexandria.'[4]

3. 'Mark was the interpreter of Peter. He wrote down as much as he remembered of the words and acts of Christ accurately but not in order. He had not heard the words of the Lord nor been His disciple, but afterwards, as I said, became the disciple of Peter. Peter used to teach in practical fashion, but did not aim at giving a systematic record of the Lord's sayings. Mark did not make any mistake in writing down such things as he remembered, for he took particular pains not to omit anything which he had heard nor to falsify a single detail.'[5]

4. 'After the death of Peter and Paul, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, gave us a written record of his preaching.'[6]

5. 'Mark wrote the second Gospel in accordance with Peter's teaching' (or perhaps 'as Peter directed him').[7]

We are safe in concluding that S. Mark's Gospel is in substance *The Gospel according to S. Peter*, and that it was produced at Rome. It would appear that its chronology, so far as it can be said to possess one, is not to be trusted, because S. Peter subordinated strict historical sequence to the exigencies of effective exposition. We cannot be certain whether it was written before the apostle's death or not. The statement that S. Peter did not wish any written record of his teaching to be made is so remarkable that it

[1] These words are not easy to translate. Another possible rendering is, *Up to that time Peter had refused either to do this himself or to allow it to be done*. The sense is plainly that he was not disposed to accede to the request.

[2] I do not think that this phrase implies any doubt as to Mark's part. The Gospel is called Mark's, but really is Peter's.

[3] *H. E.* ii. 15.

[4] *H. E.* ii. 16. It is very difficult to reconcile this statement with the preceding one. If Mark were first associated with Peter at Rome, he cannot have visited Alexandria until after the year 60. It is almost impossible to believe that there was no Church there before that date. If Mark went to Alexandria before he was at Rome with Peter, from what source did he derive the Gospel which he preached there?

[5] *H. E.* iii. 39, quoting Papias, whose authority is John the Elder.

[6] *H. E.* v. 8, quoting Irenaeus.

[7] *H. E.* vi. 25, quoting Origen.

must be presumed to rest upon some solid foundation. There is no reason why any one should have invented it, as it tends to throw discredit on the Gospel.

The statement that Mark acted as Peter's interpreter is in keeping with the belief that the apostle taught at Rome.

Christianity was born into a bi-lingual world. Between the Adriatic and the Euphrates almost everybody understood Greek, whatever their mother-tongue may have been, just as in parts of Wales where Welsh is habitually spoken now nearly every one can speak and understand English. S. Peter would have had no difficulty in making himself understood until he got as far as central Italy. He would then find that Latin was required, and it is unlikely that he would have been able to express himself freely in that language. S. Mark, like S. Paul, appears to have been of higher social position than most of the disciples, and it is therefore not unlikely that Latin had been included in his education.[1]

Against this it must be noted that there was a large Oriental population at Rome, most of whom would have been familiar with Greek, and that Christianity seems to have taken root amongst them first. The Roman Church used nothing but Greek for more than the first century of its existence. Christian Latin begins in Africa in the last quarter of the second century. If S. Peter and S. Mark addressed themselves to the Latin-speaking inhabitants of Rome, their mission appears to have been entirely unsuccessful.

C. I. 'Luke was a native of Antioch and a physician by profession. He was particularly intimate with Paul and had more than casual intercourse with the other apostles. He has left us proof of the proficiency in the art of healing souls which he acquired from them in two inspired books, the Gospel . . . and the Acts of the Apostles. And they say that Paul is referring to his Gospel when he said *According to my Gospel*, as if he were writing about a Gospel of his own composition.'[2]

The reference is to *Romans* 2^{16}. The interpretation put upon S. Paul's words cannot be maintained, as it is hardly conceivable that S. Luke's Gospel was written or even in contemplation, when S. Paul wrote his letter to the Church of Rome. In S. Paul's

[1] He was a nephew of Barnabas who was a landed proprietor in Cyprus. I suppose that a good knowledge of Latin would have been as restricted in Palestine then as a good knowledge of French or German is in England now.

[2] *H. E.* iii. 4.

mouth *the Gospel* means, quite generally, *The Christian Revelation*, and *My Gospel* is simply 'The teaching which I give'. After a time the word *Gospel* acquired the limited, technical, sense which we attach to it now. It then seemed obvious that S. Paul must be referring to some written memoir of our Lord of which he was in some sense the author, and this could be nothing except the Gospel according to S. Luke.

2. 'Luke the disciple of Paul set down in a book the Gospel which was preached by him.'[1]

3. 'The Third Gospel is according to Luke, and is the one which Paul praises. He made it for the benefit of Gentile converts.'[2]

There is no reason to doubt that the Third Gospel and *Acts* are by the hand of Luke, and that they are ultimately due to his association with S. Paul. The foregoing passages suggest that no traditions with regard to him lingered on in the Church. Eusebius and his authorities seem to have known no more about him than what they thought could be deduced from the New Testament.

There is also a story to the effect that he translated *Hebrews* from the Aramaic in which S. Paul wrote it into Greek.[3] Another tradition ascribed the translation to Clement, who was Bishop of Rome at the end of the first century.

No credence can be attached to this. The idea was probably suggested by the obvious difficulty of accepting the traditional ascription of *Hebrews* to S. Paul, as it is entirely unlike all his other writings. It seems to have occurred to some one that this difficulty might disappear if our *Hebrews* were a translation of what S. Paul had written. And who was so likely to have translated a book by S. Paul as S. Luke?

The alternative suggestion that Clement was the translator shows that the whole theory is no more than a guess. There is no reason to suppose that *Hebrews* was not written in Greek.

D. 1. 'When the holy apostles and disciples of our Saviour were dispersed over the whole world, Asia fell to the lot of John. He spent a long time there and died at Ephesus.'[4]

2. 'Ancient tradition affirms that it was then (i.e. at the accession of Nerva in September 96) that John returned from his exile in the island and took up his residence at Ephesus again.'[5]

[1] *H. E.* v. 8, quoting Irenaeus.

[2] *H. E.* vi. 25, quoting Origen. The reference to *the brother whose praise is in the Gospel* (*2 Cor.* 8[18]) seems to be interpreted as meaning St. Luke. But St. Luke's Gospel can hardly have been in existence so early.

[3] *H. E.* iii. 38; vi. 14.

[4] *H. E.* iii. 1. *Asia* means the western part of what we call Asia Minor.

[5] *H. E.* iii. 21.

The identity of John the Evangelist with the author of the Apocalypse is assumed by some early writers, but the difficulty of believing that the two books are by the same hand was felt at least as early as the third century. If they are, it follows that John must have returned from Patmos to Ephesus. It is true that Nerva stopped the persecutions which had been set on foot by Domitian, in which others beside Christians were involved, and it is therefore obvious that John might have returned from exile immediately on his accession. But the passage quoted above does not appear to rest on any very good evidence, and may be no more than a guess prompted by the assumption, which is at least doubtful, that the Evangelist was at one time in Patmos.

3. 'And John, who reclined on the Lord's breast, is buried at Ephesus. He became priest and wore the mitre, and was a martyr and a teacher.'[1]

This is a somewhat mysterious statement, and the precise significance which should be attached to it is not clear. It is, however, the kind of personal detail which might have been remembered at Ephesus a century or so after John's death. It is curious that Polycrates does not call him an apostle. Possibly he considered that this is implied by the fact that he was present at the Last Supper.

It is unnecessary to multiply quotations to illustrate the widespread early belief that John the Apostle was also the Evangelist and lived to extreme old age at Ephesus. The following references to the Gospel are of interest.

1. 'They say that John made use of unwritten preaching all his life, but finally wrote for the following reason. They say that he accepted the three previous Gospels which had been circulated everywhere and were in his own hands, and testified to the truth of their contents, but said that what was wanting was a written word of the original acts of Christ, and the beginning of His preaching.

'This is true. One can see that the three earlier evangelists record only what was done by the Saviour in the course of a single year after the imprisonment of John the Baptist.'[2]

The view that the Fourth Gospel was written to supplement the deficiencies of the other three, and that the author used for the purpose personal knowledge which at the time of writing

[1] *H. E.* iii. 31, quoting Polycrates, who was Bishop of Ephesus at the end of the second century. The word translated *mitre* appears to mean a thin plate of gold.

[2] *H. E.* iii. 24.

he alone possessed, seems to deserve more serious consideration than it has received at the hands of some critics. The possibility of an earlier ministry in Judaea about which the Synoptists are silent cannot be ignored.

2. 'Finally John, seeing that bodily things had been set forth in the Gospels, being urged by his friends and inspired by the Spirit, wrote a spiritual Gospel'[1] (or possibly 'A Gospel of the Spirit').

Personally I have never been able to see why the famous phrase *a spiritual Gospel* should be considered to mean 'A Gospel which is untrustworthy from the standpoint of history'. It is hardly open to question that the portrait of Christ drawn in the first three Gospels is inadequate. Briefly—If what is said about Him there is the whole truth Christianity becomes unintelligible. If the first three Gospels are anything but a fairy-story (and on that hypothesis it is exceedingly difficult to account for their existence), there must be a great deal more than they say to be said about their Hero. An interpretation of Christ which makes the whole story intelligible might fairly be described as *a spiritual Gospel*. The author's standpoint is not the same as that of his predecessors, but that does not make it impossible that his portrait of Christ is the best which we can ever possess.

If we prefer to translate *a Gospel of the Spirit*, the claim of the Fourth Gospel to the title is obvious.

The Muratorian Fragment[2] states that after prayer and fasting it was revealed to Andrew that John should write a Gospel. This can hardly be true, but it bears out the suggestion that John was urged to write his Gospel by friends who knew that he possessed exceptional qualifications for the task. The Fourth Gospel is especially interested in Andrew.[3]

3. 'Then John the disciple of the Lord who leaned upon His breast published the Gospel while living at Ephesus in Asia.'[4]

4. 'John's Gospel was intended for all men.'[5]

E. A note on the Apocalypse of John will not be out of place here.

1. 'If it were necessary that his name' (i.e. that of the Beast)

[1] *H. E.* vi. 14, quoting Clement.

[2] A list of the canonical books with remarks about them, which was drawn up about A.D. 170. It has been printed in Bishop Westcott's *The Canon of the New Testament*, Appendix C.

[3] 1^{40}, 6^{8}, 12^{22}.

[4] *H. E.* v. 8, quoting Irenaeus.

[5] *H. E.* vi. 25, quoting Origen. In the previous line he had said that Luke's Gospel was intended for Gentile converts.

'should be proclaimed openly now, it would have been stated by him who saw the apocalypse. For it was not seen long ago, but almost in our own generation, at the end of the reign of Domitian.'[1]

2. 'Of the writings of John the first epistle in addition to the Gospel has been acknowledged as indisputable both now and anciently. But the other two epistles are challenged. There is still a wide divergence of opinion with regard to the apocalypse.'[2]

3. 'And he' (i.e. Justin) 'mentions the apocalypse of John, saying clearly that it is the work of the apostle.'[3]

4. 'John who has left one Gospel behind him also wrote the apocalypse.'[4]

5. 'Some of our predecessors have rejected the book entirely . . . . and have said that the title is fictitious, on the ground that it is not the work of John nor even an apocalypse . . . . I will not dispute that he was called John and that this book is by John. I recognize gladly that it is the work of a holy and inspired man, but I find it difficult to hold that he is the apostle, the son of Zebedee, the brother of James, the author of the Gospel entitled *According to John* and the catholic epistle.'

(He then dwells at length on the resemblances between the Gospel and the epistle, and on the fact that the style and diction of the apocalypse are entirely different.)

'We must believe that John wrote these things, as he says so himself. But what John this was is uncertain.'[5]

[1] Eusebius, *H. E.* iii. 18, quoting Irenaeus.

[2] *H. E.* iii. 24, i.e. as to whether it is the work of John the apostle.

[3] *H. E.* iv. 18. Justin was born early in the second century at Flavia Neapolis: the ancient Shechem.

[4] *H. E.* vi. 25, quoting Origen.

[5] *H. E.* vii. 25, quoting Dionysius, who was Bishop of Alexandria 247–265. He had been a pupil of Origen and had succeeded Heraclas as head of the catechetical school in 232. Alexandria had been the home of literary and textual criticism since the third century before our era.

V. THE DETERMINATION OF THE CANON

ANY one who to-day orders a copy of the New Testament from a bookseller knows before-hand exactly what he will get. He knows that the volume will contain twenty-seven different books. If it should prove to contain twenty-six or twenty-eight, or if any one of the twenty-seven were not what he had anticipated, he would be entitled to claim a correct copy in exchange. Even the order in which the books are arranged has become stereotyped by a tradition of such respectable antiquity, that any departure from it would provoke comment.[1]

This is now so much a matter of course that there are probably many people to whom it has never occurred to speculate as to the reasons for it. The majority of Church-goers are probably unaware that there was ever any doubt as to what books the New Testament should contain, or that the collection with which we are familiar now is the outcome of any process of selection or growth. Such questions as—How does there come to be any New Testament? and—How does the New Testament come to be exactly what it is? are probably seldom asked. But a moment's reflection will show that they are perfectly legitimate questions, and in view of the importance which the Christian world attaches to the New Testament, the answers to them are worth consideration.

The Founder of Christianity wrote nothing Himself, nor did He (so far as we know) direct His disciples to commit to writing any account of what they had seen and heard. The Church began its career without any Scriptures of its own. The only sacred writings which it possessed were those which it inherited from the Jews. It agreed with the Jewish Church in regarding the Old Testament as inspired, while placing its own interpretation upon some of the contents. The possibility that the Old Testament could need supplementing did not at first present itself to any one. The idea that any other body of Scriptures of equal or superior

[1] The English versions follow the order of the Latin, which is due to S. Jerome. In modern editions of the Greek Testament, the seven Catholic epistles are usually printed immediately after *Acts*, and *Hebrews* precedes the Pastoral epistles.

value could ever come into existence would at first have been scouted as ridiculous, if not actually profane.

We may reasonably assume that very soon after the Ascension (if not before) some collection of our Lord's sayings was made for the convenience of Christian teachers. It is not improbable that there was more than one of these. Originally the sayings would have been written down in the Aramaic language in which they were delivered, but as soon as the Church showed any sign of becoming more than a Jewish sect, a Greek translation must have been found necessary. As the circle of believers widened some biographical notes might have been added for the benefit of those who had no first-hand knowledge of the facts. In this way something like what we know as a Gospel would have begun to appear. We cannot say positively to what extent this was done, but it is certain that both S. Matthew and S. Luke made use of at least one composition of this kind, which has now disappeared. In the introduction to his Gospel S. Luke implies quite definitely that he was acquainted with several primitive Gospels, though we cannot tell to what extent he availed himself of their contents.[1]

Pains were presumably taken to make these early records accurate, though the standard of verbal exactitude was not so high then as it is now. If two somewhat different versions of a saying were current, it would not have appeared worth while to try to determine which was the more authentic, provided that the general sense of both were indisputably the same. And no Orientals appear to attach very much importance to precision in matters of chronology. Discrepancies as to the order of the events recorded, or as to the lapse of time between any of them, would not have been considered serious, and it would not have been thought necessary to make an effort to reconcile them.

It would probably be too much to say that any of these primitive Gospels were issued 'by authority,' though they were doubtless the work of men who either knew the facts themselves or had access to those who did. There was no idea that they would come to rank as Scripture, and it was not expected that there would be need of them for very long. The belief was general that the Second Coming of Christ was not more than a few years distant, and that most of the first circle of disciples, if not all, would

[1] *S. Luke* 1[1].

naturally live to see it. When the logic of events had begun to shake this belief, and the need of trustworthy written records, as complete as they could be made, of the Incarnate Life had arisen, our Gospels came into being. Then copies of the earlier and less complete works would naturally cease to be made. It is probable that the greater part of their contents has found a place in the books which have come down to us.

In this way it has come about that the oldest Christian writings which we possess are the epistles. With the exception of *2 Peter*, *Jude*, and the three epistles of *John*, they are either older than any of our Gospels, or at least approximately contemporary with the oldest: namely *Mark*.[1]

The epistles are genuine letters: that is to say—they were written to meet particular circumstances, and were addressed to particular communities or individuals. They were in a sense ephemeral productions, and it is unlikely that either the writers or the recipients imagined that they would come to be regarded as of permanent value, and treasured by the Church for all time. Of S. Paul's epistles, *Romans* and *Ephesians* are the least 'occasional'. They deal with matters of more than purely local or passing interest, and appear to have been intended for circulation beyond the borders of the communities whose names they bear. They are of the nature of formal dissertations, and aim at treating the themes with which they deal[2] with more completeness than is to be expected in an ordinary letter. But it is unlikely that S. Paul contemplated universal circulation throughout the Christian world even for them. When, in his letter to the church of Rome, he referred to the value of the Scriptures, he was thinking of the Old Testament only.[3] In his eyes, and probably in those of the Roman Christians, it would have appeared inconceivable that any writings of his should ever come to rank with the inspired books of old time.

The Church began its career not only without any Scriptures of

[1] If *Timothy* and *Titus* are by the hand of S. Paul, they must belong to the last period of his life, and if we assign them to the period 65–70 or thereabouts, that would make them approximately contemporary with *Mark*. If, as some critics hold, they are not the work of the apostle, they may belong to the last ten years of the century. *Hebrews* was probably written shortly before 70.

[2] *The Nature of the Christian Revelation* and *The Nature of the Church*.

[3] 15⁴.

its own, but without any consciousness that anything of the kind would be needed, or indeed could ever be forthcoming. No formal steps to produce a body of Christian Scriptures were ever taken: that is to say—no people were ever commissioned to write them in the same kind of way as that in which Barnabas and Saul were commissioned to undertake their first missionary journey.[1]

There is a story to the effect that the fourth Gospel was written at the request of the apostles voiced by S. Andrew.[2] This statement cannot be exactly true as it stands, as it seems certain that the Gospel was not written until after the death of most of the apostles, if not of all. It may, however, preserve a reminiscence of what may be true: namely, that S. John was definitely asked to write by the elders of the Church of Ephesus. If he were then the last survivor of those who had seen the Lord, he possessed first-hand knowledge to which no other living man could lay claim. If the faith of the Christian community was being severely strained by what appeared to be the unaccountable delay of the Second Advent of Christ,[3] what could be more natural than that the one man who was capable of furnishing the necessary reassurance should be formally invited to do so?

On this theory S. John's Gospel was intended to be of permanent value to the whole Christian world, but it may be doubted whether it would have been regarded as inspired, in the same sense as the Old Testament, as soon as it appeared.

With this possible and partial exception, the Christian Scriptures may almost be described as a fortuitous collection. That is to say: they consist of works which were not originally intended to be regarded as Scripture, but have acquired in the eyes of the Church an importance which their authors did not claim for them.[4] It is reasonable to ask—How has this come about? What

[1] *Acts* 13²⁻³.

[2] The story is found in what is known as the *Muratorian Fragment*. This is a mutilated list of the canonical books written in Latin about the year 170. The author is unknown. He makes observations about the books which he recognizes, but we have no means of knowing from what source his information may have been derived. It is worth noting that the fourth Gospel displays a particular interest in Andrew.

[3] cf. *2 Pet.* 3⁴⁻¹⁴. This epistle probably belongs to the last ten years of the first century.

[4] They may be compared with our Indian Empire, which was not the outcome of any definite scheme of conquest, but grew out of a series of events which no one could have foreseen.

led the Church to invest these twenty-seven books with the unquestionable supremacy over all other Christian writings which they have enjoyed in the eyes of the whole Christian world for some seventeen centuries, of which it is inconceivable that they should ever be deprived?

The answer to these questions is to be found in the story of the first great controversy in which the Church was compelled to take part: namely the struggle with what is known as *Gnosticism*. The very word is probably unknown to-day to the majority of Christian people, but at one time the beliefs for which it stands threatened the very existence of the Church. They have left a permanent mark upon it. It is possible that if this controversy had not arisen there would never have been any New Testament, in the sense that there would never have been any collection of Christian writings at once authorized and authoritative throughout the Christian world. It is probable that hymns have played a considerable part in Christian worship from the very beginning:[1] yet, except for the psalter, the Church has never possessed an authorized hymn-book of any kind. It is probable that the Old Testament would always have held an unquestioned place throughout the Church. But the use of any Christian writings, and the importance to be attached to them, might have remained a matter of individual taste or of local custom as much as the use of hymns to-day.

The Greek-speaking part of the world into which Christianity was born had inherited a long tradition of free speculation to which Europe owes an incalculable debt. For more than five centuries before our era Greek thinkers had addressed themselves boldly to abstract questions of every kind, and their success had been sufficient to inspire them with the conviction that there could be no problem which would not ultimately prove to be soluble by purely intellectual processes.

In the fourth century before our era the conquests of Alexander of Macedon diffused a veneer of Greek civilization over the whole of what we are accustomed to call *The Near East*. It is probably

[1] *Eph.* 5[14] and *1 Tim.* 3[16] appear to be quotations from Christian hymns. About the year 112, Pliny, the Roman governor of Bythynia (a province of Asia Minor), reported to the Emperor Trajan that one of the few things which he could discover about the Christians was that they were in the habit of singing a hymn to Christ as to a god.

true to say that we owe to his military genius the fact that the New Testament was written in Greek. His most enduring monument is the city which he founded at the Canopic mouth of the Nile, to which he gave his own name. Alexandria rose rapidly to eminence, both as a centre of commerce and a seat of learning, and at the beginning of the Christian era was second only to Rome in population, wealth, and importance. Though it was on Egyptian soil, and attracted to itself a large Jewish population, it was essentially a Greek city. Geographically it was a meeting point between East and West—it might not be too much to call it a clearing-house for three continents—so that in Alexandria more than anywhere else, Greek and Oriental thought were brought into contact. From this contact the system of religious speculation known as Gnosticism took its rise.

The word is derived from the Greek *gnosis*, which means *Knowledge*. Gnostics were people who laid claim to the possession of special knowledge, which was either inaccessible in fact to the ordinary man, or beyond the grasp of his rudimentary powers. They regarded themselves as an intellectual and spiritual aristocracy, who held in their hands the only key of salvation. Salvation was by *gnosis*, and *gnosis* was beyond the reach of the majority of mankind. For part of their claim, at least, there appears to have been a considerable amount of justification. The great Gnostic teachers of the early part of the second century—Basilides, Valentinus, and Marcion—seem to have been bold and original thinkers. Intellectually they were probably superior to their Christian opponents, though their names are known to very few to-day. Our principal source of information as to their tenets is the treatise which Irenaeus, who became Bishop of Lyons in 177, wrote against them during the last quarter of the second century. By that time they had probably ceased to be a real danger to the Church: and it may be a matter for regret that our knowledge of them is derived from the criticisms of an opponent.

The actual word Gnosticism was used somewhat loosely (like Socialism in our own day) to cover a number of systems of thought which, while differing from one another in important respects, had certain conspicuous features in common. The problem with which the Gnostic thinkers were primarily concerned was the nature and origin of evil, and they appear to have accepted as axiomatic a

theory which has always been more popular in Asia than in Europe: namely, that Matter is in itself the root of all evil. Matter in any form which it can conceivably assume is necessarily inherently evil beyond redemption. Accordingly, if a Gnostic spoke of *Redemption*, he meant Redemption from the bondage of matter: not as a Jew or a Christian would have meant Redemption from the bondage of sin.[1]

An attempt to reconcile this theory with belief in a beneficent Deity was made by assuming that the world of sense is not His creation. He reigns in the remote splendour of the highest heaven, and between Him and this world there is interposed a vast graduated hierarchy of spiritual beings (usually called *Aeons*). The creation of the world has been committed to one of them (not necessarily the most exalted), and its manifold imperfections are the measure of his limitations. A day may have been anticipated when the supreme Deity would intervene in person to remedy the work of His lieutenant. (The introduction of a Deity into the system suggests something of the nature of a compromise, and should perhaps be ascribed to Greek, Christian, or Jewish influence: or possibly to a mixture of all three. The Buddhist system which knows nothing of any Deity appears to be more logical and convincing.[2])

A system of this kind would naturally prove attractive, inasmuch as its theory of evil appeared to be simpler than anything which either Judaism or Christianity had to offer. One of the great difficulties which religious thinkers have to meet is the reconciliation of the existence of evil in the world with belief in a beneficent and omnipotent Deity. Neither Judaism nor Christianity professes to present any complete solution of the problem. Gnosticism, with its theory of the inherent evil of matter, appeared

[1] Buddhism appears to use *Redemption* in the Gnostic sense to-day. Or perhaps it would be better to say that Gnostics used *Redemption* in the Buddhist sense. If a Greek had spoken of *Redemption* he would probably have meant Redemption from the bondage of Ignorance: which is different again.

[2] It is said that the Buddhists of Ceylon have in modern times introduced a Deity into their system with a view to strengthening it against Christianity. It is possible that the tradition of Theism at Alexandria was sufficiently strong to mould Gnosticism to its requirements. As Buddhism reached its zenith in the third century before our era, Gnosticism may owe it a considerable debt.

to do so: though, in fact, it only placed the problem a stage farther back, as it did not explain how what was inherently evil had come to exist. In practice this question could be ignored, and the Gnostic systems might be regarded as furnishing a theory of evil superior to anything which could be found elsewhere.

Moreover, as they were founded on pure speculation, they could be eclectic. They could borrow freely whatever suited them from any source which came within their notice. Accordingly, some Gnostic teachers imported a certain element of Christian ideas, whilst others inclined more to Greek or Jewish ways of thinking. Eclecticism in religion will always appeal to minds of a certain type, partly because it promises a more 'liberal' outlook than appears to be possible for the adherents of a single system, and partly because there appear to be obvious advantages in laying the religious thought of the whole world under contribution.[1] If religion were entirely a matter of speculation, these advantages might be real and solid.

The fundamental Gnostic tenet of the evil of matter entailed a direct collision with Christianity, because it made belief in the Incarnation of the Son of God impossible. If matter, in any form which it can possibly assume, is inherently evil beyond redemption, then the Godhead could not have allied itself with a body of flesh. It becomes impossible to say *The Word became Flesh*, because by that very act *The Word* would have been tainted with sin. If Christ were to be brought into the system at all (and it is significant that no Gnostic teacher seems to have thought it possible to ignore Him), He must have been in reality very different from the Figure in whom the Church believed.

Accordingly, by some schools His Humanity was explained away. He might have appeared to possess a body of flesh, but in reality it was an unsubstantial phantom. He was a divine being who had walked this earth as man, but had been in fact no more man than had been gods or angels, when they appeared in human form for special purposes. Pain and weariness, sorrow and disappointment—in a word all the ordinary experiences of

[1] This appears to be the principle of Theosophy (which may be regarded as the spiritual descendant of Gnosticism) in our own day, and perhaps of other less respectable cults as well. It is probably due to an inadequate sense of history, coupled with imperfect training of the critical faculty.

men and women—never could have meant anything real to Him.

This theory is technically known as *Docetism*, from the Greek *dokein*, which means *To appear*, as contrasted with real existence. The very emphatic opening of the first epistle of S. John suggests that views of this kind were not unknown before the close of the first century. The passage in *1 Tim.* 4[3]—*Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth*, suggests that at a still earlier date the apostle had come into contact with an un-Christian ascetism, based on belief in the inherent evil of matter and consequent sinfulness of every physical act.

An alternative theory was that Jesus was a real man, upon whom the Aeon Christ had descended at His Baptism, much as the Spirit of God had come upon the prophets of old time. The Aeon had wrought mightily in and through Him as long as circumstances allowed, but had abandoned Him upon the cross. The words *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken Me*[1] might not unnaturally be cited as evidence of this.

It is unlikely that docetic views of the Person of Christ will ever command much acceptance in Europe, as we should probably find it difficult to admit that a material appearance could be pure illusion. But a theory roughly analogous with the descent of the Aeon Christ upon the man Jesus has, and will probably always retain, a certain vogue. It appears to be simpler than the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, and might be accepted by some who would not perceive that ultimately it raises at least as many difficulties as it solves. Either theory destroys belief in any real Incarnation entirely, and reduces a large part of the New Testament (especially the writings of S. Paul and S. John) to the level of imaginative fiction of a misleading character.

It was also essential to the Gnostic systems to conceive God as remote from the world, and as, for a time at least, somewhat indifferent to its interests, inasmuch as He had committed its creation and management to a lieutenant whose power and wisdom were *ex hypothesi* inferior to his own. This was, and presumably is still, a commonplace of all forms of paganism, which seek to

[1] *S. Mark* 15[34]. A quotation from *Ps.* 22[1].

exalt the majesty of God by placing Him at such a distance from all mundane concerns, that His very existence ceases to be of much more than academic interest.[1] Both Judaism and Christianity took a different view. The language used by the Hebrew Scriptures about the majesty of God is as exalted as any which human lips have ever framed. But the High and Holy One, who inhabits eternity and is surrounded by innumerable hosts of angels, is also the Shepherd of Israel and the Lover of men's souls. So far from being even temporarily indifferent to the affairs of this world, He is in close and continual touch with them all.[2]

Christianity went farther still. With an audacity which could only be counted profane had it not been forced upon the Church by the facts of experience, it spoke of God Incarnate in human form. In the place of the remote potentate, too great to know or care, it declared that the Son of God had taken our nature upon Himself and had exalted it to the very centre of the spiritual order.

Both in their conception of the nature of the world and of the nature of God, Christianity and Gnosticism were in direct and irreconcilable conflict. The Gnostics also made much of Secret Lore, as was perhaps inevitable in view of their theory that salvation is by knowledge, and of their conception of themselves as an intellectual aristocracy. Current Christianity, as understood by the ordinary member of the Church, might be sufficient for the majority of mankind, and might represent the possible limit of their attainment. But this was by no means the whole of the legacy of Jesus. Much of His teaching was more recondite and more valuable than anything to be found in the books in common use in the Church. This might be derived from other books which

[1] The Greek philosopher Epicurus (342–270 B.C.) seems to have held as axiomatic that there are gods whose nature makes it impossible for them to be affected by anything which can happen amongst men. Cf. Lucretius, *De. Rer. Nat.* ii. 646.

[2] The point is of sufficient importance to be worth illustration. Paganism does not get beyond regarding the world as a machine—say a clock—which God has made. Having made it He leaves it to run by itself, subject only to a capricious and fitful interference on His part which can hardly be said to be based on any intelligible moral principle. In Jewish and Christian thought, the world is rather to be compared with a ship, of which God is the pilot. His care and vigilance are never relaxed for a moment, though human perversity may at times endeavour to ignore them. The course of the ship is determined entirely by His unerring wisdom.

were known only to a narrow circle of the elect, and were too sacred to be allowed to become common property: or it might be handed down orally by a secret tradition which could only be imparted to the small minority who had shown themselves worthy to receive it.[1]

The Church met this welter of fantastic speculation with a coherent and intelligible philosophy of history. It maintained that its Founder was neither a cosmic idea, nor even a species of angel who had temporarily disguised Himself as man, but a real man, who had really lived and died at a period which had not long ceased to be within living memory. In Him there had been a real Incarnation, so that in His life God had been revealed to men as fully as is possible within the limits of mundane existence. This overwhelming fact places God's attitude towards the world beyond question: it is the measure of the length and breadth and depth and height of His unchanging inexhaustible love for men. It is impossible to think of Him apart from it in any way, for a single moment.

And the Son of God had come to redeem the world not from the tyranny or illusion of matter, not even from the bondage of ignorance, but from the tyranny of sin. Matter is not inherently evil beyond redemption. It is only accidently evil, and deeply tainted though it may be, it is still capable of purification. This has been proved beyond possibility of question by the fact that the Son of God took unto Himself a real body of human flesh and was made man.

This redemption is bound up with the death which He really died upon the cross, and it is offered to the whole world upon the same terms. It is available for all those who are prepared to make the necessary moral choice, and to adopt a certain moral attitude. It is not the exclusive privilege of any race or class. In the Christian scheme of salvation the wise and clever, the learned and intellectual, have no initial advantage. Perhaps they must even be considered to be at a disadvantage, because they are more exposed to the supremely deadly sins of pride and self-com-

[1] Somewhat similar views seem to be held by modern Theosophists. They may possibly be considered to receive some measure of support from one or two passages in the Gospels, e.g. *S. Matt.* 7[6]: *Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine.*

placency than are those whom they must be willing to recognize as their brethren in Christ. Within the Christian Church there can be no aristocracy of any kind. It was, in fact, the first real democracy of any kind which the world had seen:[1] it might be hardly an exaggeration to say that it is still the only one which has been attempted on any considerable scale.

The controversy compelled the Church to lay great emphasis upon the historic records of our Lord's life. It was obliged to say: 'Such and such books give a true picture of Him as He really was. They tell us what He really said and did, and they really mean exactly what they appear to mean. They have been the public property of the Church ever since they were written. We receive them because we know that they rest upon unimpeachable authority. No other accounts of Him which differ from these can be accounted trustworthy. Above all, no secret traditions which purport to have been handed down about Him are of any serious value.'

The conclusion that four accounts of Him, and four only, are worthy of credence was reached with a rapidity which must be considered remarkable when we remember how slow and laborious was the multiplication of copies of books, and how difficult it must have been for widely separated Churches to have much inter-communication. By the middle of the second century there appears to have been no serious doubt. By that time our four Gospels were not only generally accepted throughout the Christian world, but had no rivals.[2] It is probable that they had held a position of pre-eminence for at least a generation before this date, so that the controversy confirmed an existing reputation rather than established a new one. The effect might be expressed

[1] The so-called democracies of the ancient world were not democratic in any real sense. In any Greek state, as in the Roman republic, the citizens were a small fraction of the entire population. All powers and privileges were concentrated in their hands, and the leisure which they devoted to the pursuit of art, letters, philosophy, and political experiments was made possible by the existence of a large body of servile labour. It is probable that by the beginning of our era the slave population considerably outnumbered the free in all the more important towns.

[2] Except possibly the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*. More will be said about this work in the next chapter. Its claim to acceptance would have rested largely on the fact that (so far as we can judge) it did not differ much from our *Matthew* and could not have been counted heretical.

by saying that it raised them from the level of religious classics to the rank of Inspired Scripture.[1]

The Gospels were not, however, the only writings whose claim had to be considered. The secret traditions which the Gnostics professed to possess could only be defended on the ground that they had come through the apostles. The Gospels were brief, and it was *prima facie* not inconceivable that facts about our Lord, or teaching which He had really given, might have been handed down by other channels which were no less trustworthy.[2] Accordingly, the Church had to decide whether there were any writings which, because they were known, or at least believed, to be the work of apostles, could be regarded as trustworthy witnesses to the historic Christian tradition, or as a genuine exposition of the mind of those who had seen the Lord.

Here there was naturally a larger margin of uncertainty. Of the twenty-three apostolic writings which our New Testament contains, the acceptance of two—*Acts* and *1 John*—would have followed naturally the acceptance of the third and fourth Gospels, as there was no reason to doubt that they were by the hands of the evangelists. No question appears to have been raised regarding *1 Peter* or *James*, or about the thirteen epistles ascribed to S. Paul. They had all probably been widely read as religious classics for at least a generation.[3]

The hesitation which was felt with regard to the six remaining books is intelligible.

Hebrews had appeared anonymously, and all attempts to discover the author have so far proved unsuccessful. Originally it was probably known not to be the work of S. Paul, so that it had to make its way by its intrinsic merit. The fact that it deals with a question which would not be of supreme interest to Gentile Christians, and might appear to be of diminishing importance as the destruction of the Temple became more and more remote, would naturally tend to delay its general recognition. At first

[1] The history of the formation of the Canon need not be repeated at length here. For a brief sketch of it cf. *Problems of the New Testament to-day*, by R. H. Malden, pp. 40–53. (O. U. Press, 1923.)

[2] See Chapter VI, p. 149.

[3] Doubt as to the Pauline authorship of the pastoral epistles is entirely modern. In any case they are based on letters which were really written by S. Paul and preserve at least some fragments of his teaching.

it appears to have been overshadowed by another work of the first century, called the Epistle of Barnabas, which addresses itself to the same theme—namely the difficulty occasioned by the disappearance of the Temple, and everything for which it had stood in the religious history of the Jews.

Barnabas is immeasurably inferior to *Hebrews* in every respect. But its argument (if we may so describe its series of assertions) was in line with a familiar method of interpreting the Scriptures, and seems to have caught the popular taste.[1]

The Revelation of S. John was regarded with a certain amount of suspicion, which was no doubt partly due to the fact that the authorship was uncertain. The difficulty of ascribing it to the fourth Evangelist was obvious, and it is cast in a mould unfamiliar to Gentile readers. Christians of Jewish origin were well-acquainted with works of this type, as there had been a considerable output of them in Jewish circles from about 200 B.C. onwards. But as, with certain small exceptions,[2] they had never ranked as Scripture, it might naturally be thought doubtful whether any apocalyptic writing ever could.[3] The apocalypse of John might appear to belong to a class of literature which had always been regarded as of doubtful value, and its obscurity would naturally retard its general use. It might well be thought hardly worth while to multiply copies of a book which few people could understand, and thus a considerable time might have to elapse before what is probably one of the latest books in the New Testament, could become generally known throughout the Christian world. At this day the Church of England makes less use of it in public worship than of any other book in the New Testament.

2 and *3 John* were also regarded with some doubt. Their brevity and obviously private, or semi-private, character necessarily made their public utility uncertain, and it has always been open to question whether The Elder is to be identified with the Evangelist. If they were the work of an unknown hand, and if the author were neither an apostle nor one of those who had seen the

[1] *Barnabas* treats the Law as having been from the outset an allegory which was never meant to be taken literally. *Hebrews* treats it as a real thing, which has now done the work for which it was ordained.

[2] e.g. the latter part of *Daniel*.

[3] The name given to books which deal with revelations, from the Greek *apocalyptein* which means *to reveal*.

Lord, what was their title to be included amongst the writings which the Church was coming to regard more and more as its final Court of Appeal?

2 Peter and *Jude* may also be said to have hovered on the verge of the Canon. They definitely claim apostolic authorship, but it is probable that in early times some doubt was felt as to whether this claim could be justified. There is probably no modern scholar who would admit it without reserve. They can hardly be dissociated from a group of works which appeared under the name of Peter during the earlier part of the second century.[1] The practice of attaching a venerable name to a composition of later date had long been customary amongst the Jews, and might almost be regarded as no more than a literary convention, which was not intended to deceive anybody. It hardly amounted to more than an expression of opinion on the part of the real author that this is what Enoch, or Solomon, or S. Peter, or whoever it might be, would say if he were still alive.

It is possible that these two epistles owe their place in the New Testament to the belief that they are by the hand of the apostles whose names they bear. But they might have won it fairly by their intrinsic value. Their burden is *Stand fast in the familiar ways: reject innovations because they are undesirable*, and they are thus an important early testimony to the existence of a definite and intractable Christian tradition, derived through the apostles, with which ingenious speculators could not be allowed to tamper.

The exact limits of the New Testament were not absolutely fixed until early in the fourth century, but after the middle of the second the margin of uncertainty was neither large nor important.

The *Revelation of Peter*[2] came near inclusion, and early in the third century Origen of Alexandria quotes the *Shepherd of Hermas*[3] as if he regarded it as inspired Scripture. He appears to have been alone in this view.

By the time that Irenaeus wrote against the Gnostics, the crisis

[1] See Chapter VI, p. 138.
[2] See Chapter VI, p. 144.
[3] An allegorical work referring to the Church which was written about the middle of the second century. It may be compared with the *Pilgrim's Progress*.

was over. He could appeal confidently to the public tradition of the Church as contained in the books which were common property and generally recognized as authoritative. This tradition was also to be found, uniform, in all the more important centres of Christian life, where it had been transmitted by an unbroken succession of accredited teachers from the time of the apostles. In this connexion he makes use of the phrase *Apostolic Succession*. To him this succession is to be found in continuity of teaching, and is the guarantee that what is being taught is the true Christian tradition. It does not suggest a ministerial gift transmitted from generation to generation by the episcopate.[1] The struggle compelled the Church to define its position more rigidly than had been necessary before, especially with regard to the books which it was proposed to recognize as trustworthy. The decision which was reached is the more impressive because it was not formal. It does not rest on the pronouncement of any formal Council (circumstances would have made it difficult, if not impossible, for any Council, representative of the whole Church, to have been got together), nor does it represent the judgement of any individual. It was reached—we may say—gradually, or with remarkable speed, whichever we choose, by the general sense of the Christian World.

The defeat of Gnosticism may be regarded as the triumph of the common sense of the average man, whose honest sense of fact was too stubborn for the fantastic speculations of an intellectual coterie.

It may be argued that the struggle engendered in the Church an unduly conservative habit of mind, from which it has never been able to free itself. The appeal to stand fast in the old ways has been exaggerated, and has been fatal to spiritual enterprise. It has seriously hampered the Church whenever it has had to face new conditions. Whatever truth there may be in this, it is hard to see how some such result could have been averted. The alternative would have been worse.

With the death of the last of those who had seen the Lord, the creative period of Christianity necessarily came to an end; at any rate for a time. If from A.D. 100 to 150 the Church had not

[1] The English Tractarians appear to have been the first people to use the words in this sense.

been rigidly conservative, it would have disintegrated altogether. It would have degenerated into a form of Theosophy, and would mean no more to the World to-day than any of the religions which were in vogue when it was born, to some of which it bore, in certain respects, a superficial resemblance.

We may even doubt whether anything with any reasonable title to be called Christianity would survive for very long in our world, unless a distinction between inspired and uninspired writings were carefully drawn and rigidly maintained. If we hold that it is possible to distinguish between truth and falsehood in religion, and that Christianity rests upon a foundation of historic fact, from which it cannot be separated any more than a tree from its roots, it follows that the Church must from time to time adopt an attitude, which will appear unreasonable and unduly narrow to a large number of well-meaning people. It will be hotly resented by all those whose imagination is stronger than their sense of truth; and they are, at least, a not inconsiderable body of mankind. But the value of such obstinacy is too obvious to need explanation or defence.

Another controversy of the second century has left a mark upon the Church's attitude towards the Bible sufficiently deep to call for mention here. Shortly after the year 150—the exact date is unknown—the movement known as Montanism arose in Phrygia. Montanus, its author, was a convert to Christianity, and is said to have been, in early life, a priest of Cybele. Little is known about him personally; but he attracted some remarkable followers, among whom were two prophetesses named Priscilla and Maximilla.

Phrygia had long been the home of what might be called ecstatic religious cults: its great goddess Cybele stood for what may be described roughly as an enthusiastic form of nature-worship, accompanied by obscene practices of various kinds. The soil and atmosphere were favourable for a religious movement of an emotional character.

Montanus and his followers taught that the Second Coming was imminent, and that the New Jerusalem would shortly descend upon a village called Pepuza in Phrygia. Meanwhile, the Holy Ghost was speaking through them for the last time, and this new dispensation of the Spirit was to crown and surpass the Revelation

of God in Christ; as that revelation had crowned and surpassed the earlier dispensation of the Old Testament.

The movement spread rapidly, and was the subject of much discussion at Rome and elsewhere. While it was naturally regarded with a certain amount of suspicion, the decisions of Synods were not wholly unfavourable, and in Africa it gained the adherence of no less a person than Tertullian.[1]

At its best, it is comparable with the evangelical revival which took place in England in the eighteenth century. Like the original Methodists, the Montanists appear to have been people of high character and real religious fervour, who thought—not altogether without reason—that the official Church was too narrow and rigid in its outlook. They were anxious to revive spiritual life,[2] and to vindicate the royal priesthood of the laity. On the whole their influence was probably beneficial. But—again like their English successors—they seem to have exaggerated the place of emotion in religion,[3] and so to have lent themselves to beliefs and practices which the Church could not countenance.

The greatest difficulty which they created arose from their claim to direct plenary inspiration. If the Holy Ghost were speaking through them it followed that their utterances must be regarded as infallible and as entitled to over-ride, or at least to supplement, the accredited Scriptures of the Church. Accordingly, the Church was forced to ask itself more explicitly than it had done yet—*What is the nature of Inspiration?* and *By what criterion can Inspiration be tested?*

The earlier controversy with the Gnostics had raised the question—*What is the true Christian tradition?*—and this had been comparatively simple to answer. The Church could say: 'It is to be found only in the writings of those who had access to accurate information about the historical facts on which it rests, because it

[1] Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus of Carthage. He was born about 160: became a Christian about 190 and died about 240. He is the founder of Christian Latin and the first mind of really first-rate calibre in the Church since the death of the fourth Evangelist. He was a prolific writer and a master of incisive style.

[2] Like the early Methodists the Montanists seem to have adopted a more ascetic rule of life than had become customary in the Church.

[3] Scenes which may fairly be described as hysterical sometimes accompanied the preaching of John Wesley, and he came to regard physical convulsions as a mark of the new birth by the Holy Spirit.

is primarily a matter of history. It is further guaranteed by the teaching which is in fact being given now by those who can manifestly trace their intellectual ancestry to the apostles, or to members of the apostolic circle.'

The Montanist claim could not be met in this fashion. The historical events of the past were not now in dispute. The question was whether teaching, which was admittedly new, was on the same level of inspiration as the teaching of old time. If it were not, on what ground was its claim to be denied? If the teaching of S. Paul and S. John had come to rank with or above that of Moses and the prophets, how could the theory of continuous and expanding inspiration be dismissed as necessarily untenable? [1]

It is obviously very difficult to define Inspiration, even more difficult than it would be to define genius, because it is of the very nature of inspiration to traverse convention, defy precedent, and reverse expectation. Fortunately the Church has never attempted to do so. There is no definition, or even description, of inspiration which can be regarded as finally authoritative: and it is unlikely that there ever will be.

It has been pointed out above that the writings which now constitute the New Testament won their way to what may be called inspired rank by a gradual and almost instinctive process. This test, the test of gradual recognition and acceptance,[2] is probably the most effective which can be applied. But necessarily the application takes time, and the question at issue did not brook delay. Montanism had appeared suddenly and was spreading rapidly. There was obviously much to be said in its behalf, and it was equally clear that serious criticisms might be brought against it. But if its claim to direct and plenary inspiration were admitted, all criticism fell to the ground. Accordingly, the Church was faced with the urgent necessity of erecting some standard of inspired teaching to which appeal could be made.

The criterion was found in apostolic authorship. The books which had gradually come to be regarded as constituting the body

[1] Islam makes precisely this claim. The Old and New Testaments were sufficient for their day, but have now done their work and have been transcended by the teaching of Mahomet, who is the last and greatest of all prophets. I suppose that the disciples of Emanuel Swedenborg and Mrs. Mary Baker G. Eddy make a similar claim for their masters.

[2] Which is applied to the decisions of Councils.

of Christian Scriptures, were entitled to rank by themselves because they were the work of apostles. The apostles had admittedly held a unique position. They had stood in an exceptional relation to our Lord, which could never be repeated in the case of any other body of men. Whatever claims might be made for themselves by other Christian teachers (and those which were made by the Montanists appear to have been of an exalted character), no one at the close of the second century could pretend that he stood precisely where the apostles had stood. It was therefore reasonable to postulate a unique quality in the writings of the apostles, which placed their works in a position of permanent and indisputable supremacy.

The Gospels of Mark and Luke did not exactly satisfy this test, because it was known that they were not the actual work of apostles. But they were assumed, probably in the main not incorrectly, to rest on apostolic testimony. They might therefore be considered to be of apostolic authority. Moreover, it does not appear that their historic accuracy was in dispute. The questions which were being raised did not touch the historic facts of our Lord's life so much as the interpretation which was to be put on His teaching. The other books of the New Testament had given the Church, as it were a definite orientation: they had directed the Christian tradition into certain well-marked channels, and the question was—Were these channels the right ones or not? The Church replied in effect—'They must be, because they were all dug by apostles, who must have understood better than any one else the nature of the Christian revelation, inasmuch as it was given primarily and directly to them. The apostles alone are the true interpreters of the mind of Christ.'

The equation Inspiration = Apostolic authorship may be open to criticism in itself. And the assumption of apostolic authorship is, as we have seen, difficult to defend where *2 Peter* and *Jude* are concerned. It is no more than a hypothesis in the case of *Hebrews*, and is open to doubt in the case of the three epistles assigned to S. John. There is also some uncertainty as to whether the Pastoral epistles were left by S. Paul exactly as we have them now, and the authorship of the *Revelation of John* is an old problem which we are never likely to be able to solve.

It would therefore appear that the ground on which the Church

defended the supremacy of the New Testament is not in reality as solid as those who took their stand upon it in the second century believed. But the fact that their critical knowledge and insight were in some instances at fault, does not vitiate the soundness of the general position which they desired to maintain. As in the controversy with the Gnostics, though not in quite the same way, the question turned ultimately on the value of the historic element in Christianity. If the Christian Gospel could only have sprung from certain definite historical events, and could not be conceived apart from them, it followed that there must have been a creative epoch in its history which never could be repeated. The men who took part in the events must stand by themselves, and their teaching must be unique in character and importance. No subsequent epoch could profess to do more than revive the past. The nature of the Gospel made it such that it could never be re-written, or even supplemented.

It is possible that the Church of the second century did not handle the Montanist movement as wisely as it might have done, just as the Church of England might perhaps have made more of the Methodists in the eighteenth century. We may hold that the rejection of the Montanist claims caused a large volume of fine spiritual fervour to run to waste. But in the second century the very existence of the Church was still at stake, and it could only hope to survive by being at pains to maintain its distinctive characteristics. Its greatest danger was lest it should conform too closely to any of the cults by which it was surrounded, and end by being merged in the vast ocean of pagan thought and feeling which lapped it on every side. The danger was particularly acute if it proceeded from a cult or movement which deserved to be counted at least semi-Christian. Surrender to Montanism would have meant exaggeration of the emotional element in religion, and would have opened the door to all manner of fanciful assertions. The resultant faith would inevitably have tended to become more and more excitable, and more and more fantastic. Its relation to the fundamental facts of the Christian revelation would have become less and less intimate, and its power to regenerate would have evaporated. Eventually there would have ceased to be any real distinction between Christianity and any of the hysterical performances which Asia Minor had long been accustomed to

regard as the high-water mark of religion.[1] If this had happened, Christian faith and practice would probably mean no more in our world to-day than do the rites of Cybele; and the sacrament of the Lord's Body and Blood would be as unfamiliar as are the mysteries of Mithras.[2]

The danger was averted by the Church's obstinate refusal to allow that any utterances could rank with those which belonged to the great creative epoch of its history. If this conviction compelled it to assign to apostles works which were in reality by other hands, the consequences of this error of judgement have not been serious. The line between the New Testament and other writings or pronouncements had to be clearly drawn, and there is no doubt that the Church succeeded in drawing it in at least approximately the right place. If an unduly rigid conception of the nature of inspiration has resulted (which is disputable), this does not seem an excessive price to pay for saving the Christian revelation from dissolution.

[1] The performances of the Dancing Dervishes are the best known instance of this type of worship at the present day.

[2] A form of sun-worship which appears to have originated in Persia. It became extremely popular in the Roman Empire, especially in the army. Much of its teaching appears to have been pure and lofty. In the third and fourth centuries it was a really formidable rival to Christianity. But because it had no root in historical fact it withered away.

VI. THE APOCRYPHA

EVERY one is familiar with the words *Canon* and *Canonical,* but the process by which they acquired their present significance is not, perhaps, so widely known.

The words are Greek, and *canon* meant, originally, a straight bar or rod of any kind. It is used in Homer of the two bars which were placed across the concave back of a shield to enable the warrior to hold it. In later times the word acquired a metaphorical meaning, and was used to signify a rule or regulation of any kind. Hence it came to mean a standard by which anything might be tested: and it is in this sense that it comes into ecclesiastical usage. It was applied first to Creeds, as being standards by which the beliefs of the individual might be tested, and to decisions of Councils, as regulating points which had been matters of uncertainty or dispute. The adjective *canonical* seems to be applied to Scripture first by Origen, early in the third century, in the sense of *authorized.* The earliest use of the substantive *canon* in this connexion appears to be in the works of Amphilochius of Iconium, about the year 380. The meaning *authoritative* which is usually attached to the words now, was a further and quite natural development. If certain books were *canonical* that meant that they were authorized by the Church for public use; and this in its turn meant that they were authoritative. They were authoritative as being the only trustworthy records of the Christian tradition, and as the final court of appeal in all disputes in matters of faith or morals. In this sense the Book of Common Prayer might be called canonical, as distinct from the prayer-books which have been produced by groups of amateurs during the last few years.

The opposite to *canonical* is *apocryphal*; and this word, too, has changed its meaning considerably in the course of its history. It comes from the Greek *apocruphos,* which meant originally no more than *hidden* or *secret.* When applied to religious books it seems to have meant *for the initiated only,* with the implication that they were too sacred or too difficult to be placed within the reach of all and sundry. Secret lore of various kinds played an important part in

paganism, and probably does so still; and if it were committed to writing, it was obvious that the books which contained it must be guarded jealously, lest their official custodians should lose the most valuable part of their stock in trade. Such books often appeared under venerable names, and from about 150 B.C. onwards there was a considerable output of them in Jewish circles. The insertion of some great name of antiquity such as Enoch, Moses, Elijah, or Solomon, in the title became perhaps little more than a literary convention which was not seriously intended to deceive.

While such books are in a sense *apocrypha* the most accurate title for them is *pseudepigrapha*, which means *Not really written by the person whose name appears on the title-page. The Wisdom of Solomon* is the best known work of this class.

In the English Bible *apocrypha* is the title given to a number of books which form a kind of appendix to the Old Testament. Some of them, however, are not really apocryphal in any sense. The *Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach*, for example, does not profess to be anything which it is not. The author does not attempt to conceal his identity, nor to claim for himself any authority beyond that to which he was entitled. The sub-title of the book *Ecclesiasticus*, which means *The Church Book*, shows that its suitability for public use was recognized.

The first book of the *Maccabees* is not apocryphal; nor is the second, except in the sense that it is not trustworthy as history. In this sense *Chronicles* might be called apocryphal in contrast with *Kings*.[1]

These books were written too late to be included by the Jews in their canon of Scripture, but found a place in the Septuagint, which was a Greek translation of the Old Testament, made before the Christian era. Their presence there led to their inclusion in the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Bible made by S. Jerome in the fourth century. For more than a thousand years the whole Christian world regarded them as part of the Old Testament. The translators of the English Bible

[1] The Jews recognized the inferiority of *Chronicles* by placing it in the third division of the Scriptures. This division was called *The Writings*, and its contents did not rank with either *The Law* or *The Prophets*. *Kings* was included in *The Prophets*.

took the Hebrew Canon as their model, and removed them from the Old Testament proper. They did not, however, want to ignore them completely, so relegated them to the appendix and gave them, not quite accurately, the title *Apocrypha*, to call attention to the fact, which is also emphasized in Article VI in the Prayer-Book, that they were on a different footing from the rest of the Bible.

It was obvious that books which appeared under venerable names were not in reality what they professed to be; and they did not acquire the vogue for which their authors presumably hoped. They were 'hidden', or 'put away', in practice as well as being 'secret' in intention, because their character did not entitle them to general public use. In this way *apocryphal* came to mean *spurious* or *untrustworthy*. This sense, which the word invariably bears now, seems to have been definitely given to it by S. Jerome in the latter part of the fourth century.

The Jewish practice of writing anonymously under the aegis of a venerable name was continued in Christian or semi-Christian circles, so that a considerable body of Christian apocrypha came into being. The majority, at least, of these works aspired to canonical rank, inasmuch as they aimed at supplementing or correcting the teaching of the books which were accepted by the Church; and in one or two instances they nearly attained it.

In some eyes the New Testament will always appear to be disappointing because of its reticence with regard to certain matters about which some curiosity is not unnatural. With the exception of one incident it tells us nothing about our Lord's childhood and early years.[1] It gives no account of the experience covered by the phrase in the Creeds *He descended into hell*, so that we are left to interpret S. Peter's reference to the preaching to the spirits in prison [2] as well as we can.

It is almost completely silent as to the doings of the apostles after the Ascension: the only death recorded being that of James, the brother of John,[3] and it does not attempt to describe in detail the life of the world to come. It leaves no room for doubt that there is a life beyond the grave, and that the position in the spiritual world which we shall be adjudged fit to hold, will prove to have

[1] *S. Luke* 2⁴¹⁻⁵¹. [2] *1 Peter* 3¹⁹. [3] *Acts* 12².

been determined by the use which we have made of our opportunities here. Anything further is concealed in the language of metaphor, which was never meant to be understood literally. Certain religious or pseudo-religious developments of our own time show that there are many people incapable of appreciating the value and necessity of this reserve. Accordingly, as was not unnatural, books were produced which aimed at satisfying curiosity on all these points. It is possible that some of them were hardly intended by their authors to be read as actual history, but corresponded with the historical romances which were popular during the earlier part of the nineteenth century. The principal characters were historical personages, and were made to say and do whatever the author thought appropriate. His aim was edification rather than the imparting of accurate historical information; which, in fact, he did not possess.

The Christian apocrypha fall naturally into three well-marked groups according to the subjects with which they deal.

1. *Gospels.*

These may be divided again into Infancy-Gospels and Passion-Gospels. With the exception of the *Gospel according to the Hebrews* (about which more will be said at the close of this chapter), none of them contain anything which deserves to be taken seriously.

2. *Acts.*

These record the adventures of the apostles in various parts of the world. They contain nothing of any real importance, though it is possible that in one or two instances they may have preserved scraps of authentic tradition. As a rule, it is unlikely that the authors possessed any sources of information which are not accessible to us.

3. *Apocalypses.* (*Revelations*).

In these the author professes to have received direct communications from supernatural sources relating to the spiritual world, which have placed him in possession of information of unquestionable value to which ordinary mortals can have no access.

The Christian apocalypses carry on a Jewish tradition, the value of which had always been regarded as somewhat questionable. In Jewish eyes apocalypse had always presented itself as a degenerate daughter of prophecy; as something which (to put it roughly) was better than nothing when no real prophet was to be

had. Partly for this reason, and partly on account of the late date at which it began to appear, very little of it was admitted into the Canon of the Old Testament. It is therefore worth noting that the only apocalypse which has been given a place in the canon of the New Testament is not the isolated phenomenon which the ordinary reader of the Bible is naturally apt to think it.[1]

It is the one work of its class whose author[2] was considered by the Christian world to have vindicated his claim to plenary inspiration, and, despite the highly conventional method of expression which he adopted, to have produced something of permanent religious value. No one who reads the book intelligently is likely to find fault with this judgement.

There are also three sets of apocryphal correspondence, between our Lord and Abgar king of Edessa; between Pontius Pilate and Tiberius; and between S. Paul and Seneca. None of them have any claim to be regarded as historical.

The first was probably inspired by the desire on the part of some native of Edessa to show that his church was independent of any other, inasmuch as it had not been founded even by apostles but by our Lord Himself. Edessa was in Syria, and Christianity had made its way there so early that there was no record of the exact channel by which it had come.

In similar fashion the fact that Glastonbury is the oldest Christian sanctuary in England, and that its origins are really lost in the mists of antiquity, gave rise to legends that it had been founded by Philip the apostle, or (at a later date) by Joseph of Arimathea.

The second is intended to show that Pilate subsequently felt remorse for having consented to the Crucifixion.

The third may have been prompted by a feeling, which is really groundless, that the ethics of Seneca[3] are too lofty to have been entirely independent of Christianity. If it were admitted that a

[1] See Appendix A at the end of this chapter.

[2] It is difficult to identify him with John the Evangelist. If the apostle and the evangelist are not the same person, it is possible that he may be identified with the former.

[3] Lucius Annaeus Seneca was a distinguished philosopher who, at one time, acted as adviser to the Emperor Nero. The emperor subsequently wished him to commit suicide; which he did A.D. 65. Contact between him and S. Paul is not impossible, but there is no reason for thinking that it took place.

pagan could rise to such heights unaided, the claim of the Christian revelation to unique supremacy might seem to be imperilled.

Besides the Apocrypha proper, there are a number of what are called *Agrapha*. The word means *Unwritten things*, and is applied to sayings of our Lord which are not 'written' in the technical sense, because they are not to be found in the New Testament. Some of them are quoted by early writers, and have therefore always been known to the Christian world. Others, which may be derived from the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*, were brought to light in 1897 and in 1902 at Oxyrhynchus in Egypt. Unfortunately the papyri which contain them are in a very fragmentary condition, and the restorations which have been attempted are not in many instances more than ingenious conjectures.

S. Paul's quotation [1] proves (if proof were needed) that sayings of our Lord which have not found a place in our Gospels might be preserved in the memory of the Christian society. It is therefore possible that some of the *agrapha* are genuine: or at least embody trustworthy reminiscences of His teaching. The majority of them provoke suspicion by their cryptic character, and suggest the tendency to represent Jesus as having spoken only, or at least primarily, for a small circle of initiates, which was conspicuous in the teaching of the Gnostics.

In some circles there was undoubtedly a feeling that if Jesus were a figure of unique and overwhelming religious significance, there must have been a larger esoteric element in His teaching than the Church as a whole was prepared to admit. This might have led to the manufacture of sayings as recondite as the author thought His teaching ought to have been.

The principal Christian apocrypha have recently been edited by Dr. M. R. James, Provost of Eton College,[2] and are therefore readily accessible to any one who wishes to examine them. In the following pages I have availed myself of his translation.

The first point which must strike any reader is the authors' inordinate love of the marvellous. Their exuberance in this respect has close analogies in pagan literature, but is in sharp contrast with the sober restraint displayed by the canonical writers. Miracles are not only more abundant in apocryphal than in canonical books, but they are of a very different and (it must

[1] *Acts* 20[35]. [2] *The Apocryphal New Testament*. (O. U. Press, 1924.)

be added) very unconvincing character. Their main purpose is obviously to glorify the hero of the narrative, and to impress the spectators: or, more accurately, the reader, as in most cases the author knew perfectly well that there never had been any spectators of the incidents which he describes.

This is the kind of conception of the nature and purpose of miracles which a superficial and not over-intelligent reader of the canonical Gospels would be likely to form, so that these stories may be regarded as early examples of a long line of productions more conspicuous for the fervour of their piety than for depth or insight.

The miracles ascribed to our Lord in the New Testament are comparatively few in number, and may be said to involve as little interference as possible with the normal constitution and course of nature. Their immediate aim is always one which commends itself instinctively to our conscience, and they are directed by perfectly clear and intelligible moral principles. They demonstrate that the entire visible order is at bottom and in reality spiritual, so that it cannot be interpreted correctly upon any other hypothesis, and that God is not irrevocably bound by His own precedents. A new departure which breaks through previous limitations is always possible with Him. These two principles are the very foundation of the Christian Gospel: apart from them the Incarnation of the Son of God becomes inconceivable, and the public ministry of our Lord unintelligible.

Once these two principles have been demonstrated, they have been established for all time. No multiplication of miracles then or now could add anything whatever to them. The desire to see signs and wonders can only proceed from failure to grasp their true significance, which is why the gratification of it would be futile. It is unnecessary to embark here upon any discussion of what is sometimes called 'spiritual healing'. But those who think that it ought to form part of the normal ministry of the Church to-day appear to be under some misapprehension of the nature and purpose of the miracles recorded in the New Testament.[1]

[1] S. Paul seems to assume that *gifts of healing* and *miracles* will be found in the Church. He does not imply that their distribution will be universal, or that any special significance need be attached to them. (*1 Cor.* 12^{9}, ^{10}, ^{29}, ^{30}.)

The apocrypha transport us into a very different atmosphere. Two well-known extracts from the *Gospel of Thomas*, which professes to give an account of our Lord's childhood, will be sufficient illustration.

1. 'The little child Jesus, when he was five years old, was playing at the ford of a brook . . and having made soft clay he fashioned thereof twelve sparrows. And it was the sabbath-day when he did these things . . . and a certain Jew when he saw what Jesus did . . . departed straightway and told his father Joseph. And Joseph came to the place and cried out to him saying . . . Wherefore doest thou these things on the sabbath, which it is not lawful to do? But Jesus clapped his hands together and cried out to the sparrows and said to them: Go! and the sparrows took their flight and went away chirping.'

This performance does not rise above the level of a conjuring-trick, and is comparable to the feats which were ascribed to pagan magicians. The author may have had in mind the technical breach of the sabbath with which our Lord was charged,[1] and may have wished to show that from His earliest years He had treated the Jewish law on this point with indifference. If so, he overlooked the point that while a breach of the law might be defended in face of urgent human need, it could not be justified by an idle display of supernatural power.

2. 'After that again he went through the village, and a child ran and dashed against his shoulder. And Jesus was provoked and said unto him, Thou shalt not finish thy course. And immediately he fell down and died.'

Comment is unnecessary.

While miracles of this type are naturally most common in the Gospels, they are to be found in the Acts as well.

Sometimes the object is not merely to gratify curiosity with regard to points on which the canonical Gospels are silent, but to re-inforce their testimony as to two cardinal points of Christian belief, the Virgin-birth and Resurrection. Some people seem to have felt that the canonical evidence for these facts is insufficient, and accordingly aimed at strengthening it by testimony drawn from other sources, which if it were genuine would be irrefragable.

[1] *S. Mark* 2[23]–3[6].

For example, in the *Book of James* it is stated that both Joseph and Mary underwent the ordeal prescribed by the law for those who were suspected of unchastity, 'and all the people marvelled because sin appeared not in them. And the priest said, If the Lord God hath not made your sin manifest neither do I condemn you. And he let them go. And Joseph took Mary and departed unto his house rejoicing and glorifying the God of Israel.'

The midwife who was present at the birth (which was attended by marvels to which the canonical Gospels make no reference) is said to have informed Salome immediately that Mary was a virgin.

In the *Gospel of Nicodemus* (also known as the *Acts of Pilate*) a priest named Phinees, Addas a teacher, and Aggaeus a Levite, are represented as coming from Galilee to Jerusalem to inform the Sanhedrin that they had seen Jesus with His disciples sitting upon a mountain called Mamilch, and that they had seen Him taken up thence into heaven. Naturally this report is received with incredulity, but it is confirmed by the testimony of Joseph of Arimathea, who describes an appearance to himself in the house in which Annas and Caiaphas had caused him to be imprisoned. Further evidence is supplied by Karinus and Leucius, two men who were known to have been dead and buried, but are found to be alive in their house. Karinus and Leucius produce a detailed description in writing of the Descent into Hell, and of their own resurrection.

The most interesting of the apocryphal Gospels is the *Gospel of Peter*. It cannot have been written much after 150, and may be some years before that date. It is the earliest non-canonical account of the Passion which we possess. It was known to Origen, and, according to Eusebius, to Serapion who was Bishop of Antioch about 190. A fragment of it was discovered in 1884 at Akhmin in Egypt, which is sufficient to show that it was quite definitely heretical.

It states that when the Lord was crucified He kept silence *as one feeling no pain*. This is clearly intended to mean that His humanity was not real, so that no physical experience could mean anything to Him. The author is pressing the docetic view of the person of our Lord, to which reference has been made in the previous chapter.

At the close Christ is represented as saying—*My power, my*

power, thou hast forsaken me, and the account ends with the words —*And when He had so said He was taken up.*

This shows that the author endorsed another view which was current in some Gnostic circles, that the aeon Christ descended upon the man Jesus at the Baptism and departed from Him upon the Cross.

He was acquainted with our four Gospels and definitely dissented from their teaching. His purpose in writing was not to produce accurate history, but to put forward a view of the person of Christ different from that which was held by the Church. Accordingly, he re-tells the story (of which he could have had no first-hand knowledge) in his own way. It is unnecessary to labour the point that either of his theories (which appear in fact to be mutually exclusive) is irreconcilable with what the Church understands by the Incarnation, or with any belief in anything which could be called an Atonement.

Besides the Gospel[1] there was also a work called the *Preaching of Peter* which has not yet come to light. Our principal source of information about it is Clement of Alexandria, whose literary activity falls between the years 190–203. He treated it seriously, and appears to have thought that it might be genuine, at least in part. There is no evidence that it was unorthodox.

There are also references to a work, or works, called the *Teaching of Peter* and the *Doctrine of Peter,* but we are not in a position to say whether either (or both) of these was identical with the *Preaching* or not. Clement's pupil and successor, Origen, quotes as if from the *Doctrine,* a passage which seems to belong to the *Gospel according to the Hebrews.*[2]

By the end of the second century a considerable body of what may be called Petrine writings had come into existence. They were of varying degrees of orthodoxy, but no one of them can be regarded as the genuine work of the apostle. It is possible that some of them contained some trustworthy reminiscences of his teaching. It is, I think, difficult to dissociate the canonical *2 Peter* and *Jude* entirely from them. If we are right in ascribing

[1] For the *Apocalypse of Peter* see below, p. 144.

[2] The difficulty of verifying references in ancient books must have been very considerable, and it is possible that this most diligent of all students of Christian literature sometimes relied too much upon his memory.

them to this circle, they are presumably its earliest productions, and owe their place in the canon partly to the fact that the date at which they appeared made it possible that they might be by the hand of the apostles whose names they bear, and partly to the fact that they are not unorthodox.

The manufacture of books under the name of Peter may have been due partly to a feeling that the pre-eminent position which he occupies in the canonical Gospels and early chapters of *Acts* was endangered by the great and growing influence exercised by the writings of S. Paul and S. John. He was becoming overshadowed by them; and as the day when his pre-eminence should be, as it were, vindicated by the pre-eminence claimed by the Bishop of Rome was still far in the future, it seemed expedient to show that he too had left an extensive literary legacy to the Church.

There appears to be some connexion between the Petrine apocrypha and Alexandria, and this suggests the possibility that their production was stimulated by a desire on the part of the Church of Alexandria to assert its dignity. In the second century Ephesus, Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria were the four principal centres of Christian life. They were, beyond question, the great churches. Alexandria alone could not claim direct connexion with any apostle. It was impossible to pretend that it had ever been visited by one of the Twelve: even the assertion that the church had been founded by Mark the evangelist had no very solid foundation. There was considerable rivalry between Alexandria and Rome, and it was impossible to deny that the Roman church was apostolic in origin. It had enjoyed the presence of both S. Peter and S. Paul, and their bones were in its keeping. But if the world were bound to look to Alexandria for copies of almost all S. Peter's writings, that meant that the Alexandrian church possessed an apostolic tradition which could scarcely be counted inferior to that of Rome. If Rome had seen S. Peter in the flesh, it might be possible to show that a century after his death Alexandria was better acquainted with his spirit, inasmuch as it possessed records of his teaching.

To ancient eyes the prestige of the apostle, and the dignity of the church of Alexandria, might well appear to demand imperatively the production of what a modern historian can only describe as forgeries.

The apocryphal *Acts* are open to the same adverse criticisms as the Gospels. On the whole they are more interesting, as it is always possible that they may preserve some scraps of historical truth.

The *Acts of Thomas*, which is the only one of the five primary *Acts* (the other four being *John, Paul, Peter*, and *Andrew*) surviving in complete form, states that the apostle went to India, and sold himself as a slave to King Gundaphorus, by whom he was employed as an architect.

Gundaphorus is an historical personage whose coins exist. He reigned over part of what we call the Punjab during the first century of our era, so that contact between him and an apostle is not outside the region of possibility. Ancient writers used the word *India* to signify any little-known region which could be reached by way of the Red Sea. If we think it unlikely that S. Thomas got as far as what we mean by India, the story may preserve a true reminiscence of the direction in which he went.

Since the fifth century at least, and perhaps for longer, there has been on the Malabar coast a Christian community of Syrian origin which bears the name of *Christians of S. Thomas*. At the present day they are said to number about three hundred thousand souls. They may be an off-shoot of the Nestorian church of Persia.

A passage in the *Acts of Paul* which has often been quoted, describes his meeting with Onesiphorus at the entry of Lystra.

'And he saw Paul coming, a man little of stature, thin-haired upon the head, crooked in the legs, of good state of body, with eyebrows joining and nose somewhat hooked, full of grace: for sometimes he appeared like a man and sometimes he had the face of an angel.'

There may be a kernel of historic truth in this description. The book is said to have been written by a presbyter of Asia (who was degraded from his office for the imposture) about the year 160. If this is true, it is the work of a man who had moved in Church circles in a part of the world which S. Paul had really visited, about a century after the event. He may have met people who had heard the apostle described by those who had actually seen him.

We have reason to think that S. Paul was not a man of commanding physical presence.[1]

[1] *Acts* 14^{12}; *2 Cor.* 10^{10}.

It sometimes happens that an episode in an apocryphal book is clearly based upon a statement made by a canonical writer. It is then an amplification or embellishment of what is considered to have been treated with undue brevity. There was precedent for such supplements to the original text in Jewish commentaries on the Scriptures of the Old Testament: and it is not easy to say how seriously they were intended to be taken. They aimed at edification; and in their authors' minds the distinction between truth and fiction was less clear than it is to us.

There is a good example in the *Acts of Paul.*

When writing to the Corinthians about the resurrection, S. Paul says—*If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus,*[1] where the reference is obviously to the riot described in *Acts* 19^{23-41}. In S. Luke's account the episode ends quietly with the dispersal of the crowd from the theatre.

This did not satisfy the presbyter of Asia. He may have failed to recognize that S. Paul was using the language of metaphor, and so thought that the apostle's reputation for truthfulness demanded that an actual fight with wild beasts should be recorded.

Or he may have thought that S. Luke had missed a good opportunity of glorifying his hero, and of emphasizing the exceptional measure of divine protection under which he lived. On either supposition the omission called for rectification, and offered a chance of furnishing edifying reading which a conscientious Christian teacher ought not to ignore.

Accordingly, S. Paul is represented as having been imprisoned at Ephesus, and then as having been cast to the beasts in the theatre, by the order of Hieronymus, governor of the city. (The presbyter had forgotten that in no circumstances could a Roman citizen be thrown to the beasts. If anything of the kind had been contemplated S. Paul would certainly have claimed the protection of the law, and no provincial governor would have dared to refuse it.[2])

'A lion then of huge size and unmatched strength was let loose upon him, and it ran to him in the stadium and lay down at his feet. And when many other savage beasts, too, were let loose it was permitted to none of them to touch the holy body, standing like a statue in prayer. At this juncture a violent and vast hail-

[1] *I Cor.* 15^{32}. [2] cf. *Acts* 22^{25-29}.

storm poured down all at once with a great rush, and shattered the heads of many men and beasts as well, and shore off the ear of Hieronymus himself. And thereafter with his followers he came to the God of Paul, and received the baptism of salvation. But the lion escaped to the mountains.'

The hail-storm is a good example of a familiar stage-device known as *deus ex machina*.[1] Ancient playwrights not infrequently allowed a drama to develop until an absolute deadlock had been reached. Then a divine figure—Apollo or whoever it might be—appeared suspended in mid-air at the back of the stage, and solved the problem with supernatural authority and address.

Every one knew that S. Paul did not in fact lose his life at Ephesus, so that it was incumbent upon the presbyter to devise some means of extracting him from the arena.

The Apocalypses are upon the whole less interesting than the Acts, because there is no possibility that any fragment of historical truth has been preserved in them.

They do not profess to be history, but are descriptions of the spiritual world which have been communicated to their authors by direct supernatural agency. They are conventional in form and unconvincing in character, and were written to gratify the unwholesome curiosity which cannot content itself with the austere simplicity of the New Testament.

The *Apocalypse of Paul* furnishes a good example of the desire to 'improve upon' canonical statements.

S. Paul refers once to a remarkable spiritual experience which befell him. He declares that he was *caught up to the third heaven*,[2] but though the experience was one which could never be forgotten, he does not attempt to describe it in detail. He contents himself with saying that what he had heard could not be repeated. It would have been easy for him to have allowed his imagination to run riot, and had he done so no one could have ventured to question a word of whatever he had chosen to say. He appears to have felt that while the experience was beyond question real, any account of it which he could give would be untrustworthy. Deliberate reticence was the only right course. When we consider the nature of some other professed communica-

[1] Literally—*A god out of a machine.*
[2] *2 Cor.* 12[2-5].

tions from the spiritual world,[1] we cannot but admire the apostle's resolute self-restraint.

Not so, however, the author of the *Apocalypse*. He describes the discovery, by revelation from an angel, of a marble box buried under the foundation of S. Paul's house at Tarsus. The box was sent to the Emperor Theodosius (379–95), and proved upon examination to contain a complete account of the revelation which the apostle had seen.

Naturally the book is concerned principally with what passes in heaven, and comparatively little space is devoted to the punishment of the wicked. Among the functions of the angels is the duty of delivering to God regular reports upon the condition and conduct of mankind. The following extract will be sufficient to illustrate the general character of the contents.

'And the angel answered and said unto me: Follow me, and I will bring thee into the city of Christ. And he stood upon the lake Acherusia, and set me in a golden ship, and angels as it were three thousand sang an hymn before me until I came even unto the city of Christ. And they that dwelt in the city of Christ rejoiced greatly over me as I came unto them, and I entered in and saw the city of Christ. And it was all of gold, and twelve walls compassed it about, and there were twelve towers within and every wall had a furlong between them round about; and I said unto the angel: Lord how much is one furlong? The angel answered and said unto me: It is as much as there is betwixt the Lord God and the men that are on the earth, for the great city of Christ is alone. And there were twelve gates in the circuit of the city, of great beauty, and four rivers that compassed it about. There was a river of honey, and a river of milk, and a river of wine, and a river of oil. And I said unto the angel: What are these rivers that compass the city about? And he said to me: These are the four rivers which flow abundantly for them that are in this land of promise, whereof the names are these: the river of honey is called Phison, and the river of milk Euphrates, and the river of oil Geon, and the river of wine Tigris. Whereas therefore when the righteous were in the world they used not their power

[1] They commonly enter into a wealth of detail, most of which can be traced without difficulty to the circumstances and presuppositions of the recipient.

over these things, but hungered and afflicted themselves for the Lord God's sake, therefore when they enter into this city the Lord will give them these things without number and without all measure.'

The description of the heavenly city is continued in this strain at some length. The apostle is then shown something of the sufferings of those who had died in their sins.

The *Apocalypse of Peter* is of more interest and importance. It is not very much later than the canonical *Apocalypse of S. John*, and came near finding a place in the New Testament. It has probably influenced Christian thought more than any other non-canonical book. The fragments of it which exist are sufficient to show that it was concerned principally with the torments endured by the wicked.

This fact, coupled with its early date, suggests that it was intended as a supplement to *John*.

The canonical apocalypse is a Christian prophecy, or a Christian philosophy of history, written, like its Jewish forerunners, to keep faith and hope alive in time of trouble. Its message is that Might is not Right. Despite any appearance to the contrary, the triumph of Christ is final and complete already; the full manifestation of the victory which He has gained is merely a question of time. The triumph can only be described in the language of metaphor. The imagery employed owes a great deal to the Old Testament, and something to non-canonical Jewish sources. The overthrow of Evil will be complete : here again metaphor is the only possible medium of expression.

The faith and courage of the author and his grasp of God's purpose justify the inclusion of his book in the canon, despite the obscurity and conventional character of much of the phraseology which he employs.

It is, however, possible for the reader to miss the point of the book: especially if his own lot be cast in more peaceful times. He may consider that it was written to furnish mankind, as it were, with an accurate map of the spiritual world, so that its value really depends upon the completeness of the picture drawn.

On this assumption, which entails interpreting the metaphorical language with prosaic literalness, the book becomes defective in at least one important respect. It gives no adequate account of the

ultimate fate of the wicked. The torments described in Chapter 16 belong to this life: in Chapter 19 we are told that the Beast and the False Prophet *were cast alive into the lake of fire that burneth with brimstone,* but it is clear that this stands for complete annihilation. Their followers are to be killed with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, but nothing is said as to their final destiny. In Chapter 22 it is said that various types of sinner are excluded from the Holy City, but there is no attempt to depict their fate.

The author of *Peter* seems to have misconceived the purpose of *John,* and to have read the book as if it were meant to supply information which must be beyond our present reach, and would be of no practical value if it were not. Accordingly, he set himself to supply what was lacking in the earlier work, by describing in detail the varied torments of the lost.

The success with which his book met suggests that he was by no means alone in his misconception of the purpose of *John,* and in his desire to gratify curiosity by trespassing on ground which the older writer had seen no reason to wish to tread.[1] In colloquial language—he showed himself unable to see the wood for the trees.

Some of the apocrypha were better known in the Middle Ages than they are now. They appealed more readily than the canonical Scriptures to undisciplined imaginations, and have exercised a considerable influence on Christian thought and art. This influence has been especially noticeable where the Virgin Mary is concerned. As the desire to do her honour (which is probably not unconnected with the growth of clerical celibacy) increased, it brought with it a desire to pay her homage by every means which art could render possible. The New Testament provides very little material for this purpose, so recourse was had to apocryphal works in which her life and miracles are set forth in detail. There was, for example, a very complete set of such scenes in the Lady Chapel of Ely Cathedral. They have all been defaced deliberately, but the subjects of a considerable number have been identified by Dr. James. It is not clear how much credence the Church of Rome places in such stories at the present day.

[1] When our Lord spoke of the ultimate fate of the wicked, He drew His imagery from the valley of Hinnom. This was the refuse-heap of Jerusalem, to which no living thing came. His language would not have suggested unending torment to His hearers, but complete destruction. (*S. Mark* 9[44].)

Sometimes the medieval artist drew his material from less familiar sources. There is an example of this at Peterborough, which is sufficiently uncommon to merit description in detail.

In the middle of the western front of the church are two lofty porches, above which is a figure of S. Peter enthroned, immediately below a representation of our Lord. The shaft which divides the porches ends in a base, sculptured in relief, on which a curious scene is represented. There is a human figure head-downwards, surrounded by demons who are not, however, touching him. He is dressed in what might be taken for a monastic habit, and has sometimes been described as 'a Benedictine monk in hell'.[1] There can be little doubt that he is in reality Simon Magus.

Simon appears in the eighth chapter of *Acts* as a sorcerer of Samaria. He tried to induce the apostles to sell him their secret of conferring the Holy Ghost by laying on of hands, and was sternly rebuked by S. Peter. Here the story ends. Towards the close of the second century some one produced a book known as the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies*[2] or *Recognitions*, in which there is an episode or set of episodes known as *The Tours of Peter*.

The apostle is represented as resolved to end Simon's career by exposing him as an impostor. With this end in view he pursues the magician from place to place. For a long while Simon succeeds in eluding him, being fore-warned of his approach by magical arts. Eventually both arrive at Rome, and are summoned before the emperor to give an exhibition of their powers. Simon flew in the air by the aid of demons whom he controlled. When he had reached a convenient height the prayers of the apostle compelled the demons to let go their hold. Simon fell to the ground and was killed.

Representations of this scene are probably very rare. It is appropriate that in a conspicuous position in a church bearing S. Peter's name and, literally under the apostle's feet, should be depicted the final discomfiture of his arch-enemy.

Enough has been said to illustrate the kind of relation which the apocrypha bear to the canonical books. They are the work of

[1] Peterborough was a Benedictine House, which became the seat of a Bishop in the reign of Henry VIII.

[2] So called because it purported to be by Clement, Bishop of Rome, at the end of the first century.

men who found the New Testament unsatisfactory, either because it did not gratify their curiosity on various points, or because it discountenanced theories of which they approved, or made no reference to views which they thought ought to be given a prominent place in Christian teaching. They show that there have always been people for whom the austerity of the Christian revelation was too much: who desired to make religion more attractive to what S. Paul meant by *the natural man*. The apocrypha were intended to supersede, or at least to supplement, the Bible, and were regarded by groups of people much as the works of Emmanuel Swedenborg, or Mrs. Mary Baker G. Eddy are by some circles to-day. It is perhaps not too much to prophesy that a time will come when *Heaven and Hell* or *Science and Health* will be no more widely known than are the *Apocalypse of Peter* or the *Acts of Andrew* now.

The demand for such productions will probably always exist, and will always create its own supply. Circumstances may cause its insistence to vary at different periods. It became pronounced during the fourth and fifth centuries, when the policy of Constantine had made Christianity first safe and then fashionable. The sharp distinction between Christian and pagan ways of thinking naturally became somewhat blurred, and a confused jumble of notions as to the content of the Christian revelation and the purpose for which the Church exists ensued, from which much which has passed as Catholicism was born.[1]

But the Christian apocrypha are of more than purely antiquarian interest. They show that the Scriptures which we respect are not the only books offered for Christian consumption in early times. Our New Testament is the outcome of a long and careful process of selection, whose results are the more impressive inasmuch as they were not reached by any formal procedure. The formation of the Christian canon cannot be assigned to any individual or council. It was instinctive rather than deliberate, and was effected gradually by the general sense of the Christian world. The books which were excluded may really be said to have excluded

[1] A good illustration can be found in the works of Aurelius Prudentius Clemens (348–410), the first great Christian poet. Sometimes his hymns attain real nobility of thought and feeling. But his general outlook and mental attitude are really pagan.

themselves. Despite the claims which they made for themselves, Christians all the world over came gradually to feel that they could not be taken seriously: and were, in fact, not worth reading. No one who examines the fragments of them which remain is likely to challenge this decision.

It will probably never be within our power to frame an exact definition of Inspiration, but no one can turn from the New Testament to the Apocrypha without feeling that he has passed into a different atmosphere. He exchanges a world governed by intelligible moral and spiritual principles, for one where the natural course of events is liable to be dislocated at any moment by irrational, and sometimes downright immoral, magic. He parts company with writers whose primary concern is obviously with sober narrative of fact and rational processes, and has to consort with men whose guiding principles appear to be fantastic imagination and prejudice. A comparison between the two sets of books will show that the Church had good grounds for bestowing on the New Testament a title of some kind which it could not allow any other literature to share.[1]

In view of the fact that the majority of church-goers are probably unaware of the existence of the Christian apocrypha, it is worth while to call attention to this point. Enough is known to enable us to say positively that the discovery of 'a fifth Gospel destined to revolutionize Christianity' which was, for a brief space, announced to the world a year or two ago,[2] is an impossibility. If what purported to be a new Gospel were brought to light, it would merely be one of many on which judgement has been passed already. The more it differed from the Christian tradition the less would be its claim to be taken seriously: unless, indeed, it could be proved to be the work of an eyewitness. This is really inconceivable because no book of apostolic authorship

[1] The oldest Christian writings outside the New Testament are the epistle of Clement of Rome, and the seven epistles of Ignatius of Antioch. The former was written about 95: the latter about 110. They are not apocryphal in any sense, and are of great interest and value. But the difference between the intellectual calibre of the authors and that of S. Paul and S. John must strike even the most casual readers.

[2] By an Italian *savant* named Fusco. He also believed himself to have discovered the lost books of the Roman historian, Livy. This, though not inconceivable, proved to be also a misapprehension.

could have remained entirely unknown to the Christian world for so long.

There was, however, one Gospel which has disappeared, which was on a very different level from that of the other apocrypha: the Gospel *according to the Hebrews*. It was written in Hebrew or Aramaic, and seems to have been a somewhat shorter and divergent form of *Matthew*. Our principal source of information about it is S. Jerome (*c.* 348–420), who quotes from it on several occasions. At one time he appears to have regarded it as the original of our *Matthew*. In his own day it was used by a body of Aramaic-speaking Christians, known as Nazarenes or Nazareans, at Berea: the modern Aleppo. The Nazareans were not a normal Christian community, but it is not clear whether their orthodoxy was under suspicion or not. They may have been merely what we should call provincial and conservative. So far as we know, their Gospel was not heretical in tendency.

In his *List of Ecclesiastical Writers* when speaking of James the Lord's brother (whom he regards as the son of Mary the sister of the Virgin, not as the son of Joseph by a former marriage), he quotes a well-known passage—'The Gospel which is called *According to the Hebrews*, which has lately been translated into Greek and Latin by me, of which Origen frequently makes use, says, after the resurrection of the Saviour—*The Lord when He had given the linen cloth to the servant of the Priest went to James and appeared to him. For James had sworn that he would not eat bread from the hour in which he had drunk the cup of the Lord until he should see Him rising from amongst them that sleep.* And again a little farther on—*Bring ye* saith the Lord *a table and bread.* And immediately is added—*He took bread and blessed and brake it and gave it to James the Just and said to him: My brother eat thy bread, for the Son of Man is risen from amongst them that sleep.*'

It is tempting to identify this with the appearance to James, to which S. Paul refers in *1 Cor.* 15[7]. The giving of the linen cloth to the priest's servant is a curious detail, and seems to imply that the Lord took steps to make the fact of the Resurrection known to the High Priest's party. It also makes James the Just present at the Last Supper.

It is difficult to take literally S. Jerome's statement that he had translated the Gospel into Greek and Latin. He may mean that

he had translated such portions of it as he had occasion to use in his own writings.

Hebrews appears also to be the source of the story of the woman taken in adultery, which is now usually prefixed to the eighth chapter of S. John's Gospel.

S. Jerome noted that whereas all copies of *Matthew* (whether owing to a slip by a copyist or an error by the evangelist) read *Zachariah son of Barachiah* (23³⁵), *Hebrews* preserved the clearly correct *son of Jehoiada.*[1]

It is perhaps not impossible that some considerable fragments at least of this Gospel may yet come to light. Egypt is probably the most likely field for such a discovery. Until the fifth century of our era the Egyptians continued to embalm their dead, and there was a large demand for waste paper to pack the interstices of the coffins in which the bodies were placed. A mummy-case may therefore yield almost anything in the way of manuscripts for which their former owners had no further use.

Such a discovery would be of the very highest interest, but there is no reason to suppose that it would have any startling effect upon religion. It might bring to our knowledge incidents and sayings of which we are at present ignorant, which we might feel disposed to accept as genuine. But if it differed in any important respect from the canonical Gospels, there would be no reason for allowing it to over-ride their authority. We should know that it had all been before the Church before, and that the Church had decided that it was not worth while to go to the labour and expense of continuing to make copies of it.

The relation of *Hebrews* to *Matthew* is obscure. Possibly both Gospels were versions of the story current at Jerusalem, and therefore, though not identical at all points, had a large element in common. The number of Christians who would require a Hebrew or Aramaic Gospel in preference to a Greek one can never have been large. After the fifth century the demand for such a work would have ceased, so *Hebrews* may have been ousted by the longer *Matthew* which was of use to a much wider circle of readers,[2]

[1] Zachariah, the son of Jehoiada, was stoned in the Temple Court at the command of Joash. *2 Chron.* 24^{21}.

[2] There may be a rough analogy in the history of our own Church. I believe that a Cornish version of the Bible was made for the congrega-

and was perhaps known to be more trustworthy, as well as more complete.

More light might be thrown upon the question if a complete copy of the works of Papias[1] were to be discovered. His *Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord* would probably show us what he understood to be S. Matthew's Gospel, and might provide a solution of certain literary problems which baffle us at present.

tions in what was sometimes called *West Wales*. The demand for copies can never have been large, and ceased about the end of the seventeenth century. It would probably be difficult, despite printing, to lay hands upon one now. If the Cornish Bible had differed in any respects from the Authorized Version, we should have had something not unlike *Hebrews*: a peculiar version in the language of a small community which has now ceased to exist. The Nazareans of Aleppo may have resembled in more ways than one the Cornish-speaking congregations which lingered on in remote places.

[1] See Chapter IV, Appendix A.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER VI

Apocalypses.

IT may be worth while to elucidate further what has been said in the foregoing chapter about apocalypses in general.

A distinctive element in the religion of the Hebrews was Prophecy. From time to time men arose who declared themselves to be the mouthpieces of God. They claimed intuitive knowledge of His will, and affirmed that they had been chosen by Him to proclaim it to their fellow-countrymen. In the case, at least, of those whose writings have found a place in the Old Testament, the conscience of mankind has admitted their claim.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the debt which the world owes to the Hebrew prophets. It is enough to say that they laid the foundation on which our Lord built. Their teaching as to the nature of God, and His relation to the world, is the basis of everything which religion can ever mean to us.

For the most part the prophets were content to say, *Thus saith the Lord* or *The word of the Lord came unto me*, but sometimes their inspiration was in some sense derived from a vision. Isaiah's vision in the Temple (Ch. 6) is the first outstanding example of this. (Compare the locusts, fire, plumbline, and basket of summer fruit seen by Amos (Ch. 7 and 8.) It is possible that the first and fourth of these were not visionary, but physical realities which prompted the prophet's message, just as actual scenes of everyday life prompted some of the parables of our Lord.)

After the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., the visionary element in prophecy increases. The book of Ezekiel opens with a vision of a living chariot in which God goes forth into the earth. The purpose of the appearance is clear. It was Ezekiel's work to persuade his fellow-exiles that all was not lost irretrievably. God was not dead: neither had He cast them off for ever. Restoration was still within the bounds of possibility.

The visionary or pictorial element is further developed in *Zechariah* 1–8, where the theme is the deliverance of Israel from their oppressors, and the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

It would be irrelevant to discuss the psychology of visions: even if any one who has never seen one himself could be qualified to do so. The point is that as time went on Hebrews who believed that they had a religious message to deliver to their fellow-

countrymen tended more and more to declare that they had seen something which illustrated or inspired what they had to say. This had been shown to them by divine, or at least supernatural, agency. Accordingly, the appearance and the message derived from it were called a *Revelation*: or in Greek, an *Apocalypse*.

It is obvious that as soon as a man professes to see visions he has opened wide a door for his own imagination, and has brought the possibility of unconscious self-deception near. A certain amount of caution must be exercised before credence can be placed in his assertions as to what he saw. As the Seer tended to replace the Prophet amongst the Jews, increasing doubt was felt whether he could lay claim to inspiration in the same degree as his spiritual progenitors. The possibility that he was merely trying to claim higher authority for his message than could be attached to it if it were avowedly entirely his own could not be ignored. Thus apocalyptic writing came to be regarded as a degenerate daughter of prophecy. It was not the real thing: but was better than nothing when the real thing was not to be had. Partly for this reason, partly on account of its late date, very little of it was admitted by the Jews into the Canon of the Old Testament. The most notable exception is the last six chapters of *Daniel*, which belong to the middle of the second century before our era. They are the piece of apocalyptic writing most readily accessible to the ordinary English church-goer, and may be taken as representative of the class of literature to which they belong. They were produced by the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes, who reigned from 175–164 B.C. He made an effort, the story of which can be read in the books of the *Maccabees*, to extirpate the Jewish religion, and to compel his Jewish subjects to adopt Greek habits and customs.

Apocalyptic writing is always born of times of trouble, and its burden is always the same—'Might is not right. The oppressor may be triumphant at the moment, but his complete overthrow is only a question of time. The righteousness of God will be manifested gloriously.'

Amongst the Jews it came to be believed that the righteousness of God had not been, and could not be, manifested fully until they—His Chosen—had regained their political independence. As this was certain, but obviously impossible by any ordinary means, it followed that there would be some divine cataclysm whereby the existing world-order would be overthrown, and the oppressed would triumph over their oppressors for ever.

Zech. 14^{1-9} (a very late passage) is an example of this belief.

The heathen have rallied their forces against Jerusalem and the sack of the Holy City has actually begun. At the eleventh hour God descends from heaven upon the Mount of Olives, routs the nations in one stupendous battle and establishes His sovereignty over all the earth.

Sometimes, as in *Daniel*, the heathen nations are represented as monstrous beasts who prey one upon another, but are finally stripped of their power for mischief by a human figure, who may represent Messiah, or the House of Israel.

This symbolic method of describing political events, whether current or anticipated, is familiar to us in the Political Cartoon. The British Lion, the German Eagle, and so on, correspond exactly with the monsters described in the seventh chapter of *Daniel*.

It may be worth while to show briefly how easily the late war could be depicted in the terms of Jewish apocalyptic.

'I looked, and behold a great eagle having two heads, and he flew from the east towards the west, and his wings covered the land. And he said in his heart: Aha. My nest is higher than the heavens. All people, nations, and languages are given unto me for a prey.

'And there came up a lion out of the sea, and he stood upon the shore of the sea. And the lion made war against the eagle, and the eagle was sore wounded, and fled away, and returned to his own place.

'Here is wisdom. The strength of the lion is in his hinder parts: and his hinder parts are in the great sea.'

Because apocalyptic writing always predicts the overthrow of the oppressor by some divine stroke, it is necessarily somewhat cryptic. In the first place, no one could know exactly how this would be brought about, so that the author could give free rein to his imagination. Secondly, while the overthrow of the oppressor might be certain, the time was not yet. At the moment he was in power and could make his anger felt. It was expedient to predict his downfall in terms which would be clear to those who were meant to understand them, but would do no harm if a copy of the book happened to get into wrong hands.

This style of writing naturally tended to become fantastic; much of its imagery was stereotyped by long convention.[1] The claim to have seen a vision became, in most instances, no more than a transparent literary convention. There can be no question that the Jews were right in refusing to regard these books as

[1] Cf. our pictures of John Bull.

inspired. The best which can be said of them is that they did something to keep faith and hope alive in times of trouble. They also helped to foster the spirit of fanatical nationalism which led to the final ruin of the Jewish nation, after three desperate struggles with Rome (A.D. 66–70, 112, 131).

The *Apocalypse of John* belongs to this class, and shares certain of the characteristics of its forerunners. But it is on a very different level. There can be no doubt that it is entitled to its place in the Canon of the New Testament: in other words that it is of universal and permanent religious value.

An apocalypse which affirms that the righteousness of God will be triumphant in the world is of some value, however fanatical or fantastic it may be. An apocalypse which professes to give an exact map of the spiritual world, and to satisfy curiosity by supplying information which, it is clear, God does not mean us to possess, deserves no respect.

VII. CHRISTIAN ETHICS

IN the foregoing chapters an attempt has been made to explain and emphasize the relation between the Christian religion and the facts of history. Christianity did not begin as a system of abstract speculation. It was brought into the world—we might fairly say that it was, in a sense, forced upon the world—by a number of remarkable events, from which it can never be dissociated in any way. These events are attested by the continuous existence of the Christian society from the period of their occurrence down to the present day. They are also recorded and attested by a number of documents which the same society has accepted as trustworthy.

An attempt has also been made to sketch the way in which these documents came into being, as far as it can be ascertained, and to show that the confidence which the Church has reposed in them rests upon very solid foundations.

Christianity presents itself to us primarily as a body of objective fact, which has at least as strong a claim upon our intellectual acceptance as any other body of historic fact in the world. But if that is the beginning of the whole matter, it is by no means the end. Christianity professes to be an ethical religion: it considers that from the facts on which it rests have sprung, inevitably, a body of moral and ethical principles by which human conduct, whether in public or private affairs, is to be ruled and guided.

There is not necessarily any connexion between religion and conduct. There was very little in ancient paganism, and there appears to be no more in modern. Paganism aims at securing the favour or averting the hostility of such supernatural powers as there may be, by the performance of such ceremonies as immemorial custom assures the worshippers will conduce to that end. Provided that these demands are met, the gods have no further concern with the behaviour of men. In the world into which Christianity was born those who desired moral counsel or ethical guidance looked to the philosopher rather than to the priest.[1] We hear of some philosophers who were virtually private

[1] A partial exception must be made in favour of certain Oriental cults.

chaplains to great families. The counsel given was often of real value, and made for righteous living: but it is significant that more than one eminent philosopher was suspected, or more than suspected, of atheism. It was upon a charge of atheism that Socrates was put to death: and the charge was not entirely without foundation. He presented to the State much the same difficulty as Christians were destined to present to the government of the Roman Empire.

From the middle of the eighth century before our era, the Hebrew prophets had tried to maintain a close connexion between religion and ethics, and their teaching had met with a considerable measure of success amongst their own countrymen. But outside the narrow circle of the Jewish race, religion as such did not pretend to be an ethical force.

Christianity accepted the connexion between religion and ethics from the outset as part of its Jewish inheritance; and, as always, expanded and deepened what it borrowed. Its ethical principles cut much deeper, inasmuch as they are concerned with motives and desires at least as much as with outward acts.[1] They have a wider range, inasmuch as they are not limited by race or class. The Christian Church has always maintained that its ethical principles are final and of permanent value. They cannot be identified with any particular type of civilization or social order,[2] and, partly for that reason, can never be superseded. They are of universal application: there can never be any single human being anywhere for whom they are not suitable. Every one is bound by them absolutely as far as he knows what they are: and it is therefore the paramount duty of every one who understands them to impart his knowledge to those who do not.

This aspect of Christianity is perhaps understood better amongst the English-speaking races than anywhere else. Whatever deficiencies there may be in the religious standards of England to-day, it is quite certain that if an Englishman believes anything,

which made their way into the Roman Empire during the second and third centuries of our era. Mithraism is the best known. These religions were not recognized officially by the State, and were probably always regarded with a certain amount of suspicion and dislike.

[1] e.g. *S. Matt.* 5[28].

[2] Contrast Islam. At one time its civilization was in advance of that of Christendom.

he believes that religion ought to express itself in what commends itself to his conscience as Right Conduct. If he is disquieted by anything, he is disquieted by what appears to him to be a divergence between conduct and religious profession. So far has this conception been carried that some fifty years ago there were people [1] who were prepared to accept Christian ethics as a matter of course, while denying hotly the truth of the historic events on which they rest. There are, perhaps, still some who would dispute the necessity of claiming supernatural sanction for the ethical principles by which they are prepared to order their own lives. There are certainly many who think that reasonable conformity with the canons of decent behaviour in private life is as much as religion can demand of anybody: and that in fact decent behaviour is the beginning and end of religion.

Of late years there has been an increasing tendency to challenge Christian ethical standards *en bloc*. In some instances this proceeds from dislike of the restraints which they impose. People who regard what is called 'self-expression' as the principal object of existence, and by self-expression understand nothing better than the gratification of every impulse as soon as it arises, will naturally find a rock of offence in the Christian moral code. It is probable that such characters have always existed in approximately the same numbers. The only difference is that they are more outspoken now than they used to be.

In other instances mistrust of Christian ethical standards is tinged with regret, and springs from the conviction that they have been proved a failure. They are no more than a dream, a beautiful dream perhaps, but still a dream; and therefore incapable of regenerating society. They have had their opportunity and must now make way for something more rational and practical. Ideas such as these seem to spring from the mental confusion into which the events of the last twelve years, especially the four years of war, appear to have plunged many people. At the moment they prevail widely, but it is unlikely that they will last for very long.

Christian ethics can only be challenged as a whole by those who deny the sanction upon which the Church believes them to rest. If they spring from the revelation of the Son of God the final and absolute character which the Church claims for them cannot be

[1] e.g. Professor Huxley.

disputed. Those who, for whatever reason, desire to set them aside must, tacitly or explicitly, deny the historic truth of the Christian tradition. It may be doubted whether they have always made any serious attempt to estimate the strength of the evidence on which it rests; or whether, when the attempt has been made, their equipment for the task has been entirely adequate.

There is, however, a much larger and more important class of people who honestly desire to order their lives by Christian standards, and do not dispute the authority on which they rest. Such people are religious, and recognize that religion must be an ethical force. At the same time they are conscious of a difficulty in conforming to the ethical teaching which they are prepared to regard as divine and therefore infallible. No one can deny that this difficulty is real, and that sometimes it becomes acute.

Throughout the English-speaking part of the world at least the New Testament is regarded by all Christians as a supreme standard and final court of appeal where questions of conduct are concerned. This attitude of mind is to a large extent a legacy of the Reformation.

Prior to the Reformation the Church aspired to direct and regulate all human conduct down to the minutest detail: and this was due less to the ambition of ecclesiastical rulers than to force of circumstances. From the fifth century onwards the Church was faced with the tremendous task of trying to rebuild some sort of civilization upon the ruins of the Roman Empire. The fall of the Empire had plunged the whole of Western Europe into barbarism. The Church was the one thing belonging to the old order which survived, and the only civilizing agency left in existence. It was therefore necessary that it should insist upon its right to guide and direct at every turn. Little by little its title to do so was admitted, and its great civilizing mission met with a very remarkable measure of success.

Gradually there grew up a vast body of good advice to which the individual Christian could turn for guidance in any contingency which could arise. This crystallized into what was known as *The Canon Law*. It came to be regarded as if it were a legal code, and an attempt was made to administer it as such. This development may have been virtually inevitable, but it was in fact a mistake, and gave rise to a number of increasing difficulties.

In the first place, the code aimed at being all-embracing, and therefore became of vast extent and almost incredible complexity. Mastery of it demanded a life-long study which could be undertaken by a few experts only. Every one was expected to order his life by the precepts of the Canon Law, but it was quite impossible for the ordinary man to know what they really were.

Secondly, the Canon Law defeated its own ends by the number of exceptions which it was compelled to admit. The essence of a code of law is that it should be of universal application. There should be no exceptions to it; or at least they should be restricted jealously to a bare *minimum*. For this reason a legal code must not be too ambitious in its scope. It must be restricted within carefully defined limits, and must recognize that there are considerable tracts of legitimate human activity which it cannot cover. Otherwise it will have to admit of exceptions in particular instances, where circumstances make exact application of the law impossible, and these exceptions will increase in number until they form a body of precedent of no less volume than the original law.

This was, in fact, what happened to the medieval Church. It possessed a body of law which professed to furnish complete ethical and moral guidance for every Christian. Just because it professed to be complete it became virtually unintelligible to the ordinary man, and when its ruling on any point had been ascertained it was seldom difficult to find authority for making an exception. Under a cloak of comprehensive legislation great confusion reigned in practice.

Thirdly, in England the confusion became worse than anywhere else owing to the existence of rival systems. Canon Law was Roman: it rested on papal sanction and naturally embodied the principles of the great Roman jurists. These had been collected and codified by the Emperor Justinian in the sixth century, and form to this day the foundation of the legal system of every country in Europe except our own. The Canon Law may be said to begin where Justinian left off, and its main outlines were therefore in conformity with the legal principles which were already generally accepted throughout continental Europe. In England this was not so. While a certain amount of Roman law is admitted into our procedure, the foundations of our system are independent

of Roman jurisprudence. In England Roman law is liable to be modified or set aside by our own Statute Law, or by Common Law.[1]

Accordingly, the medieval Englishman who honestly desired to abide by the laws of Church and State was not unlikely to find them at variance. It was really impossible for him to discover for himself what he ought to do, and he was therefore dependent on the rulings of authority. These were frequently contradictory, and as time went on the integrity of the supreme authority, which alone could speak with a final and decisive voice in matters ecclesiastical or religious, fell under suspicion.[2] One of the objects of the Reformation was to end confusion by procuring an ecclesiastical system sufficiently simple to be generally intelligible, and capable of being put into practice in its entirety. The only source from which the ethical portion of this could be derived appeared to be the Bible: more especially as the Reformation had been in part an appeal to the authority of the Bible against that of the Church. With the rejection of Papal authority in England the Canon Law lost whatever authority it had ever possessed. It ceased to be taught in the Universities, and a project for producing a reformed and simplified version of it came to nothing. Its disappearance left the Bible in a position of unchallenged supremacy as the sole court of appeal, and men turned to its pages with complete confidence that they would find there in simple form all the guidance which any Christian could require for the ordering of his daily life.

In theory no fault could be found with this mental attitude, but in practice it has given rise to difficulties which were not foreseen originally. It has led to the use of the Bible as if it were a species of ethical dictionary. When any ethical problem arises the Bible will furnish a complete and final solution ready-made, provided that the correct page be consulted. And until modern

[1] Common Law is, I believe, peculiar to this country. It rests on custom, not on Statute. It has never been codified and probably never could be. We have habitually acted upon the principle that long continued custom acquires the force of law *per se*, and needs no further sanction. There seems to be some difference of opinion as to whether the common law can ever be overridden or set aside. There is no question but that it is a very important element in all our procedure.

[2] As the Papacy became more and more an Italian State its interests became more and more sectional, and its financial needs increased.

times little attention was paid to the time at which, or to the circumstances in which, any part of the Bible had been written. Even if they had been known they would have been ignored; as they are by many people at the present day. The Old and New Testaments were placed upon the same footing. Any part of either provided an infallible ethical guide whose authority could not be questioned without impiety, so that the individual was divested of almost all his personal moral responsibility.

Naturally such unintelligent handling of the Bible proved mischievous, and exposed those who adopted it to much adverse criticism.

To-day the distinction between the Old Testament and the New is beginning to be generally drawn, and it is recognized that neither Patriarchs, Kings, nor Prophets can be perfect models for those who have received a fuller revelation of God. But the ethical use of the New Testament presents such formidable difficulties that the belief that it is or can be a trustworthy ethical guide has come near to breaking down altogether.

To those who approach the New Testament with this idea in mind, the Sermon on the Mount presents itself as the essence of Christianity. There the Christian code is laid down explicitly by the highest possible authority. Being a Christian begins and ends in compliance with what is enjoined there.

At this point difficulties begin to arise. It is obvious that there is no one in the world who really does live up to the teaching of the Sermon: and it is obviously impossible that anybody should. Habitual obedience to *Give to him that asketh thee* [1] would directly foster knavery and idleness, and would in a short time dissipate resources which might have done good if they had been employed with discrimination. *Resist not him that is evil* [2] and *Judge not, that ye be not judged* [3] would, if pressed to their logical and natural conclusion, make impossible the administration of any form of justice, and would leave evil-doers free to prey upon the community to their hearts' content.

It is therefore easy for those who are not favourably disposed towards Christianity, and have never acquired more than a superficial acquaintance with part of its content, to taunt Christians with making no serious effort to live up to their own pro-

[1] *S. Matt.* 5⁴². [2] Ib. 5³⁹. [3] Ib. 7¹.

fessed standards: and to add that if the attempt were made on any considerable scale it would lead to the immediate dissolution of any ordered society.

Speaking roughly attempts to find a way out of this apparent *impasse* have been along two lines.

From time to time little groups of people have resolved to make an effort to carry out the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount quite literally, and have sometimes formed themselves into separate and homogeneous communities for the purpose. None of these experiments have been entirely successful. In as far as they have achieved any success, they have done so by acquiescing in something of the nature of a compromise. The experimenters have selected certain precepts and have laid great stress upon them, but have found it convenient to ignore others which appear to be of at least equal importance. Such action is in itself a confession of failure, and suggests that there is some fundamental fallacy underlying the whole enterprise.

The best known example of such an attempt is to be found in the Society of Friends. While it is possible to charge their founder with a certain amount of unreason and extravagance, no one can deny that the Society has produced a large number of singularly beautiful characters. It has consistently set a very high standard of Christian living, and its influence upon the nation has been out of all proportion to its numerical strength. The Friends have laid great stress on the commands to abstain from violence, and have therefore refused to bear arms in war. They have also interpreted *Swear not at all* [1] as forbidding the oaths which must be taken by witnesses if justice is to be administered properly,[2] and have therefore made it impossible for themselves to hold any judicial office, such as that of magistrate. If their Society had ever become very numerous it would have been a danger to the State. Its members have had in fact to undergo a certain amount of persecution in the past, but in modern times it has, fortunately, been found possible to tolerate them.

Per contra: It is notorious that their integrity led at one time to the concentration of a very large part of the banking business

[1] *S. Matt.* 5[34].

[2] I believe that here a compromise has been effected whereby a Quaker witness can make an affirmation which the law regards as equivalent to an oath without injury to his own conscience.

of the country in their hands. In the eighteenth century, and during the early part of the nineteenth, it would have been difficult to find a well-known firm of bankers who were not Quakers. It may therefore be presumed that they found some interpretation of *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth* [1] less literal than that which they placed upon other passages: and it is not improbable that if the strong-room of a Quaker banker were to be attacked by burglars, he would invoke the aid of the civil power whose operations he declines to assist.

It is unnecessary to multiply illustrations. We must admit frankly that literal compliance with the whole of the Sermon on the Mount is impossible. Such attempts as have been made have been saved from total failure only by their inconsistency.

Another avenue of escape has been sought by the assumption that our Lord never meant His ethical teaching to be the permanent foundation of society. In common with many of His fellow-countrymen He believed that a divine catastrophe was imminent which would bring to an end the present age, and usher in an epoch, of which all that could be said with certainty was that it would be entirely unlike anything which the world had ever known. In technical language, He was a thorough-going apocalyptist, and took His stand in a line of teachers on whom the Jewish church had always looked with considerable suspicion. His ethical teaching was only intended to tide a small band of followers over a brief and anxious period of waiting, which would be closed by something virtually equivalent to the end of the world.[2]

We know that apocalyptic conceptions were popular amongst our Lord's contemporaries. The experience of centuries had led the majority of the Jews to despair of regaining political independence by force of arms. As long as they remained subjects of any foreign power it seemed that the promises of God had been made of none effect, and that the prophets had spoken in vain. The only hope seemed to lie in some overwhelming divine intervention, and the appearance of any outstanding leader fostered the belief that this was imminent.

[1] *S. Matt.* 6[19].

[2] On this theory it corresponds with what we came to know as 'War-Time Measures'.

A certain amount of support for these hopes can be gleaned from some of our Lord's recorded utterances. He would naturally have availed Himself to some extent of the kind of imagery with which many of His hearers were familiar, and it is not unlikely that any apocalyptic element which He admitted into His teaching has been somewhat heightened in transmission. It would have been in harmony with what many of His audience were expecting and hoping to hear.

Yet careful examination shows this element to be very small. It is most conspicuous in the thirteenth chapter of *Mark*, which is sometimes called *The Little Apocalypse*. At first sight we seem to be obliged to choose between saying either that our Lord committed Himself to definite predictions which have not in fact been fulfilled, or that this chapter does not represent a trustworthy record of anything which He ever really said. Either supposition gives rise to obvious difficulties of a very formidable kind. Closer examination shows that they are not so real as has sometimes been assumed.

The chapter opens with our Lord's prediction that a time would come when even the Temple would be a heap of ruins. To His disciples this seemed to mean that the end of all things was at hand. If the Temple were to go what human institution or achievement could survive?

Peter, John, James, and Andrew then ask Him privately for fuller information. They wish to know when these things shall be, and the sign by which their approach may be recognized. The motive behind the question is more than mere curiosity. It is anxiety to attain a privileged position of exceptional security, so that when the storm bursts it will not fall on their heads. Our Lord treats their request as an impossible one, and without dismissing it in so many words turns it aside. He makes clear that His followers must not expect any supernatural protection: when calamities come they must adopt such measures as ordinary prudence suggests: they must be careful not to exaggerate the significance of any startling events which may befall. In fact the whole tenor of His reply is really to dismiss current apocalyptic conceptions entirely. The so-called *Little Apocalypse* is in reality as anti-apocalyptic as anything could be.

Later, when the direct question, *Lord, dost thou at this time restore*

the kingdom to Israel?[1] showed how hard the old hopes died, He replied explicitly that the question was one which ought never to have been asked and could not be answered. Such parables as that of the Grain of Mustard-Seed[2] show that before the Crucifixion He contemplated a prolonged period of slow growth for His Church.

It is true that belief in His speedy return was general in the Church for some years immediately after the Ascension, but as time went on it was seen to be based on misinterpretation of His teaching. He steadily refused to play the part which tradition had assigned to Messiah, and it is impossible to maintain, on the evidence available, that belief in an apocalyptic consummation of His work at no distant date was ever in His mind. His ethical teaching is not to be read in the light of such a supposition.

If we assume that the Sermon on the Mount is the essence of Christianity (or at least the essence of what is sometimes vaguely described as 'practical Christianity'), and do not have recourse to ingenious devices in order to discount its value, we are immediately confronted with a difficulty. The code does not in fact work. It cannot be applied as a whole to life as we have got to live it, and this seems to compel us either to admit that Christianity is not a practicable thing; or else to assume that its range is restricted to private life, so that anything which could really deserve to be called a Christian society never can exist. Either conclusion is really despairing, and difficult to reconcile with the Church's view of the Person of Christ and the nature and scope of His redemptive work. It means regarding Him as no more than a great teacher: possibly the greatest whom the world has seen yet, but still only one of a distinguished company.

On this theory we are entitled to make our own selection from His teaching (as many people in fact do), and to supplement it from other sources as we may think fit. It is quite impossible to say that in Him *the Word became flesh*. The premiss which leads to such conclusions must therefore undergo re-examination.

It has been pointed out in an earlier chapter that to see what Christianity meant to the first Christians we must look at the apostolic writings rather than at the Gospels. The Epistles show that as soon as the Church had moved out into the Gentile world

[1] *Acts* 1⁶⁻⁷. [2] *S. Matt.* 13³¹.

it was confronted with acute ethical problems of various kinds. This was inevitable, and they had to be dealt with as they arose. If the apostolic writers had believed that the Sermon on the Mount (with which they must have been acquainted in substance at least, if not in the precise form in which it has come to us)[1] furnished them with a ready-made solution of any ethical problem with which they could be called to deal it is remarkable that they never avail themselves of it. They never quote any utterance of our Lord in any form.[2] They never try to deal with their difficulties in that kind of way.

They believed that the key to every conceivable ethical problem was now for the first time in human hands, and that those hands were their own. The use of it was not easy, but the thing did exist. It was not to be found in any actual body of teaching: there were no precepts to which appeal was to be made. It was in the new situation which had been created by the historical events in which they had taken part. Because Christ had lived, died and risen again, because He is now reigning at the right hand of God, the world has become a different place. The relation of man to God is not what it was: nor is the relation of a man to his neighbours what it used to be. These historical events have not only opened new possibilities for humanity, they have already made an actual difference because they have had some unique effect upon sin.

At this point the apostolic writers are compelled to employ metaphor. They do not attempt to state precisely how the death of Christ has affected sin, nor to explain in detail the nature and extent of the effect which has been produced. To them the fact is self-evident. The impossible has been accomplished: man's immemorial conflict with sin has been transformed by a single stroke from a losing to a winning battle.

No subsequent theologians have succeeded in carrying the question much farther. Different theories have been advanced from time to time, but the Church has never possessed any official doctrine of the Atonement. It is content to maintain that

[1] It is doubtful whether it was delivered as a connected discourse on a single occasion.

[2] The only exception is in *Acts* 20[35]: *It is more blessed to give than to receive.* This saying is not in our Gospels. It is not quoted to solve a difficulty, but to illustrate a principle.

the death of Christ has had a unique effect upon sin, so that it is possible for us to say that we have been redeemed by His blood.

The contrast between the old situation and the new is so sharp that the metaphor most commonly employed to describe it is that of transition from darkness to light.[1] The change has been as complete as any change could be. And the new situation has equipped the Church with an entirely new set of ethical principles, which could not have been created in any other way, and has at the same time invested them with new power. There can be no ethical problem to which they cannot be applied with certainty of ultimate success, though the process of application may prove long and difficult. But they cannot be applied, or even considered, apart from the events on which they rest. Any attempt to separate the teaching of Christ from His Person and redemptive work reveals a fundamental misconception of the nature of the Christian religion. The Gospel, the good news which turned the world upside down, is not the Sermon on the Mount, but what God has done for man in Christ.

The Sermon on the Mount belongs to the old order: and is therefore in a sense irrelevant to Christian ethics. It is said that every one of the precepts which it contains is to be found in earlier rabbinic teaching. Be that as it may, the Sermon may fairly be compared with the ethical discourses of other teachers. We may think that it is immeasurably superior, not only in what it says but in what it omits, but still it does admit of comparison with other ethical pronouncements. The principles on which Christian ethics are founded have no parallel elsewhere. We may accept or reject them, but they are unique.

The world has seen many ethical systems which aimed at completeness, and some of them are older than Christianity. They are the outcome of philosophical thought, and it is probable that they all contain some elements of real value. But while they may fairly be compared with each other no one of them can really be compared with the Christian system.

The philosopher who applies himself to the elaboration of an ethical system is bound to assume that he has got all the relevant *data* before him, so that the intrusion of any new factor is impossible. All his thinking is done within the limits of a closed

[1] e.g. *Eph.* 5^{8-14}.

circle which is incapable of expansion. Within the circle different logical processes are possible which may lead to widely different results. But that is all. The conditions of the problem before him are always the same, though a variety of solutions may appear to be possible.

Christianity breaches the circle at two points. First: it introduces a new conception of the nature of man. Secondly: it takes a new view of his relation to the external world.

It teaches that man is essentially and fundamentally a spiritual being, whose life is not bounded by the world of sense. His needs, capacities, and duties have to be dealt with on this new basis. His nature has not undergone any sudden change so that he has become less prone to evil than heretofore: all experience shows that human nature changes very little as the centuries go by. But until certain events had taken place the true character of man had been overlooked, or at least imperfectly perceived. The life and death of Christ have shown for the first time what man really is, and have revealed the truth with the freshness and force which always attach to a new discovery.

Christian teaching must not be confused with the idea that man consists of a divine spark entangled in a material prison from which its urgent need is to escape. The well-known saying of Marcus Aurelius [1] which has been paraphrased:

A little soul for a little
Bears up this corpse which is man

has nothing in common with the Christian Gospel.

Christianity distinguishes between the spiritual and the material, but its goal is not escape but mastery. It believes that the material can be perfectly mastered by the spiritual, and that considerable progress towards this end is possible here and now.

Secondly: Christianity teaches that the root of all evil is moral. It has never made the mistake of confusing pain with evil. Nothing which can rightly be called *evil* can be produced by circumstances which do not involve any human being in any moral guilt. A natural disaster such as an earthquake does not come under the category of what Christianity understands by evil.

[1] Roman Emperor 161–80. He was a philosopher of high personal character, and persecuted Christians for conscientious reasons.

Wherever there is real evil it means that there has been sin. Sin cannot be reduced to 'anti-social conduct,' or even to failure to realize our highest potentialities. It is the rebellion of a personal human will against God, and though deeply rooted in our nature is not a real part of us. Therefore it is never inevitable, and can be overcome. The rebellious will can be reclaimed to loyal allegiance. This is the only remedy, and Christianity affirms confidently that it is a possible one.

This conception owes something to earlier Jewish teaching, but Christianity has expanded and deepened what it has inherited to such an extent that there is no close comparison between the old and the new. For all practical purposes Christian teaching about sin and redemption is a product of the Gospel.

All Christian ethics depend upon the breaching of the old circle at these two points. If this is overlooked no criticism of them can be relevant, nor any attempt to defend them successful.

We sometimes speak of The Christian Code, but although the expression is not illegitimate it is misleading. It suggests a definite body of law which furnishes the Christian with complete ethical direction in every contingency. It is always possible for him to observe its precepts, and when he has done so his obligations are at an end.

Such a code would really relieve the individual Christian of all personal moral responsibility, and for that reason it is, fortunately, impossible that it should exist. But as a large number of people will always ardently desire it, attempts to manufacture it will be made from time to time. The medieval Canon Law was one, and efforts have been made to make the Bible serve the same purpose.

The Church must, indeed, possess rules and regulations which its members are expected to observe, but anything approaching a complete Christian code, to be administered as if it were a body of law, is impossible. Christian ethics are a body of principles and cannot be reduced to anything else. The difference between a body of principles and a code of law is very wide. Any given law is an attempt to give expression to some principle, with primary reference to some particular set of circumstances. If new and unforeseen circumstances arise the law cannot cover them and needs revision. Any legal code is always in process of becoming

obsolete, and calls for continual alteration. A fixed, permanent code of law is an impossibility; unless there could be a society immune from change of any kind.

Principles are more elastic. If they are high enough at the outset (that is to say, if they are really principles and not merely expedients), they are capable of application to any circumstances. They can never become obsolete in themselves, though the methods by which expression is given to them are likely to need revision and expansion from time to time. A body of permanent principles which do not admit of any change in themselves is not only possible, but exceedingly desirable; and this is what the Christian religion offers to its adherents.

It is, however, much easier to obey a rule than to apply a principle, and for this reason large numbers of people will always desire the former alternative. One of the most important duties of the Church is to refuse to accede to such demands, because to yield is to offer stones in place of bread.

The experience of both the Jewish and Christian churches shows that there is no policy on the part of ecclesiastical rulers which can do more harm to religion than to allow obedience to rules to usurp the place which ought to be taken by grasp of principles.

Moreover, a definite rule which has the force of law and is to be regarded as obligatory, whether it is actually enforced by coercion or not, can never represent more than a *minimum*. Because it is obligatory, it stands for the least with which the authority which framed it is prepared to be content. For a time it may aid moral growth, by, as it were, dragging a certain number of people up to a standard which they would not have reached without it. But as soon as they have reached it the same law operates as a check upon all further development. No one who has learned to look at things in a legal way will be likely to do more than the law requires: there is, in fact, no reason why he should.

Principles are entirely different. They aim definitely at a *maximum*, and no one can say exactly where that *maximum* may prove to lie. Those who try to order their lives by principles will not rest content with the punctual discharge of definite obligations. That will indeed be a matter of course, but it will be no more than a starting-point, from which they will go on from

strength to strength. Our Lord's teaching on this point is perfectly explicit and is crystallized in the saying—*Even so ye also, when ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do.*[1] The Incarnation was an act of God far transcending the obligations of the covenant with Abraham.

Law is always bound to narrow the issue as much as possible. When a man is being tried his general character is irrelevant, though it may be taken into account when sentence has to be passed upon him. The only point with which the law can concern itself is whether he can be proved to have done the particular thing with which he is charged. Any attempt to go beyond this would be inadmissible. The operation of principles is exactly the opposite. They involve the treating of every particular issue in the widest possible way and as part of something much larger than itself.

Christianity teaches that the root of all evil, and therefore of all the problems with which it is necessarily directly concerned, is moral. One outcome of sin (perhaps the worst of all) is that it makes the application of the highest principles temporarily impossible. Sin always creates a situation which, as long as it endures, can only be dealt with by methods which no one would adopt if anything better were possible. When the particular situation has been brought to an end it becomes possible to act up to the highest principles once more.

This point is important, but appears to be frequently overlooked, so that it will be worth while to give a simple illustration of it.

It is a Christian principle that every child of God has an inalienable right to his personal liberty. If he is deprived of it he is artificially prevented from attaining the fullness of the spiritual stature of which God has made him capable. But if he so abuses his freedom that he becomes a menace to others, he has to be deprived of it for a period of time by being sent to prison. This is the only way of ending a situation which the Christian principle of protecting the weak and helpless cannot tolerate any longer. At the expiration of his sentence he is restored to his original

[1] *S. Luke* 17^{10}. The literal translation is *useless slaves*. It is hardly possible to conceive any more opprobrious description.

status in the hope that he will use his freedom better in the future than he has done in the past.

To imprison him is, in a sense, an un-Christian act. But his own sin has made it less un-Christian than the alternative course of allowing him to continue his malpractices.

Failure to perceive two facts, first that Christianity works by applying principles rather than by laying down rules, and secondly that the process must, so long as sin persists, sometimes lead to the adoption of courses which are ideally indefensible but in fact less undesirable than any alternative still open, has led to considerable confusion as to the 'Christian attitude' on many points. Two are of sufficient importance to deserve mention here: namely War and Marriage.

It is indisputable that Christianity is essentially opposed to all forms of violence. Its only legitimate weapon is persuasion. It makes no difference whether the violence be carried to the length of actual bloodshed or not. From the Christian standpoint no distinction can be drawn between (say) endeavouring to impede the passage of a tram along a street by throwing stones at the driver, and endeavouring to impede the passage of a ship to its destination by discharging a torpedo without warning from a submarine. To attempt to place the two acts in different categories is merely sentimental. Both are attempts to gain an end by violence, and are therefore equally un-Christian.

We may claim that Christianity has already done a good deal to reduce the part played by violence in human affairs, and may hope confidently that it will do more. But this does not of itself determine the duty of the individual citizen when the Government of his country (upon which he depends for his daily security) decides to go to war. If he is a Christian he must entertain a conscientious objection against war together with all other forms of violence. But circumstances may arise in which the same principles compel him to entertain an equally conscientious and even stronger objection to any alternative course open to him as an individual, or to the country which has a rightful claim on his allegiance.

There is no room for discussion as to the Christian ideal of marriage. In Christian eyes the marriage-tie is sacred, lifelong, and exclusive. But when we have recognized this, we have not

necessarily determined what course of action the State should sanction or demand when the ideal of marriage has been shamelessly outraged.

The enforcing of general external conformity with Christian ideals by means of the coercive jurisdiction of the State may be said to begin at the close of the fourth century with the code of Theodosius. The history of the process suggests that its results are unlikely to conduce to the increase of true religion.

Christianity is a system of idealism, but because it is also a faith by which God means men to live, it can never shut its eyes to facts as they are. It ignores nothing and it explains nothing away. It never belittles sin or its consequences. Therefore it has outlived many rivals, both possible and actual, and will outlive many more.

As soon as we begin to reflect upon the nature and foundation of Christian ethics, it appears that 'the Christian answer' to many ethical questions which may be propounded is neither so simple nor so easy to discover as is sometimes supposed.

The New Testament does not profess to furnish us with a set of ready-made ethical directions, which any one can consult for himself. But the facts which it records and attests will, if pondered sufficiently, be found to yield a set of permanent principles on which an edifice of Christian living can be built up stone by stone. Many mistakes have been made by the builders in the past, and many more will doubtless be made in future. But because the foundations cannot be shaken flaws in the superstructure are never beyond repair.

It is the function of the Church to endeavour to secure scope for the free application of the highest principles to every department of human life. The method by which it pursues this end is the education of conscience, which must not be confused with the simpler and less profitable task of attempting to direct it. There are probably a considerable number of people in England to whom the idea that conscience can require education is unfamiliar. There is a widespread assumption that the possession of an infallible and sufficient conscience is as much part of the equipment of every normal human being as the possession of two arms and two legs. The theory is convenient, because it enables any one to place all his tastes and opinions above criticism and beyond

the reach of argument by the simple device of labelling them *conscientious*. In fact, conscience, which may be described roughly as the power of passing a right judgement on moral questions, requires at least as much education as the power of judging the merits of a work of art. Nothing but the Church can èven attempt to give this education—at least in its higher branches[1]; and the process is necessarily slow and laborious. It is bound to be attended by many disappointments which tempt the Christian teacher to surrender to impatience, and to turn to other methods which appear to promise more rapid results. As soon as he does so he has abandoned his proper work, and while he may achieve a certain measure of apparent and immediate success has made his ultimate failure certain.

The education of the collective conscience of any community may present itself to some as an impossible undertaking. It will therefore be worth while to devote a little space to the outstanding instance in which the Church has succeeded in this task in the past.

There can be no question that the greatest triumph which Christian principles have achieved as yet in the sphere of ethics and social life has been the abolition of slavery. It is probable that there are many people who do not realize how stupendous this triumph has been.

In our Lord's day slavery was a universal institution of immemorial antiquity. Defeat in war was expected to lead to the complete loss of personal liberty for at least a large portion of the population. A manual worker who could make a free contract with his employer was almost unknown. In the large towns the slave-population is believed to have outnumbered the free very considerably, so that the possibility of a rising of the slaves was the standing nightmare of the Government.

The institution was not only universal in fact, but was commonly regarded as the only possible foundation of civilized life. No civilization had ever been built up upon any other basis. Without abundant slave-labour no one could have embarked on any undertaking which was not immediately productive. No one

[1] The State can inculcate a high standard of public duty which can school conscience up to a point. I think it would be true to say that the Roman Empire did this during the second and third centuries of our era.

could have had leisure in which to pursue any form of art or learning, so that a community without slaves had no prospect of ever rising much above barbarism. Slavery played in the ancient world the part which is played by Capital and Credit in our own. It was part of the very texture of civilized society; so that any one would have said that it could not be removed without destroying the whole fabric. It is well known that the New Testament nowhere attacks slavery directly. The word translated *Servant* in our Bibles is, in many passages, really *Slave*. Slavery is accepted in common with other existing institutions.

There is one book, the epistle to Philemon, in which some denunciation of slavery as a whole might have been expected, because the existence of the system is forced into prominence. But none is forthcoming. When Onesimus ran away from his master Philemon and took refuge with S. Paul, the apostle did not commend him for what he had done, or congratulate him upon his escape. He sent him back to his master. It is true that he charged Philemon to treat him kindly, as *more than a servant a brother beloved*, and offered to pay for anything which he might have stolen. But S. Paul saw no reason for interfering with slavery in principle. Onesimus belonged to Philemon, and back to him he must go.

There is evidence that some Roman owners treated their slaves with real kindness[1]; but it is probable that they were a minority. They may even have been regarded as dangerously eccentric. On the other hand, we hear of a wealthy *eques* named Vedius Pollio who fattened the fish for his table upon the bodies of living slaves. This act was regarded with disgust: partly on account of its senseless extravagance, much as we should regard the act of a man who lit fires with bank-notes and Chippendale furniture. But while public opinion might be against it, the law did not interfere.[2]

The clearest light upon the character and effect of the whole system is thrown by the fact that Roman law did not admit the evidence of a slave in any trial on a criminal charge unless given under torture. Long experience had convinced the Romans that the truth was the last thing which any slave was likely to speak in any circumstances.

[1] e.g. Pliny's Letters, 8, 16.

[2] Pliny, *N.H.* 9, 23, 39, 77.

From the second century onwards the lot of the slave underwent some slight amelioration. Certain small rights were secured to him by law, and these were increased as the influence of Christianity began to tell. They did not, however, change his fundamental *status*. No kindly treatment at the hands of an individual master and no consideration which might be extended by the law could alter the fact that the slave was a chattel. He was a live tool which his owner could use and discard exactly as he thought fit.

The canons of the Council of Elvira [1], which was held in Spain early in the fourth century, throw an interesting light on slavery in Christian society.

Canon V enacts that if a woman kills her slave in a passion she is to be excommunicated for seven years. If she did not intend to kill her, the sentence is to be reduced to five years.

The passing of such a canon shows that brutal ill-treatment of slaves by Christian owners was at least not unheard of, and may even have been not uncommon. It also shows that the Church was beginning to regard as reprehensible actions of which the law took no notice.

Canon XLIX allows the retention of idols in Christian households if the family are afraid of violence at the hands of their slaves. This plainly contemplates the existence of large establishments of heathen slaves who might become dangerous to their Christian owners if their superstitious fears were aroused.

It would be easy to multiply quotations from various sources to show the extent to which slavery prevailed in the ancient world, and the awful effect which it produced on the characters of owner and slave alike. It is probably impossible for us to realize how every relation in life was more or less poisoned by it. Yet it was accepted as an economic necessity of civilization from which there was no escape: and there is probably no heathen community now which would not practise it if circumstances allowed.

There is no passage in the New Testament which can be quoted as a direct prohibition of slavery, and for a long while the institution did not trouble the conscience of Christians. But gradually Christendom came to see that slavery is wholly and irredeemably abominable. No consideration which may be shown in individual

[1] Routh, *Reliquiae Sacrae*, vol. iv.

instances, even if these should come to constitute a very large majority, can alter, or even really disguise its fundamental character. It is impossible for one member of the Christian family to own another, or even any other human being, in the same way in which he can own an axe or a horse. Little by little the Christian conscience awoke to the perception of this, and slavery melted away before the Gospel like snow in spring-time. The process may appear to us now to have been unduly prolonged: in reality the speed with which the change was effected was amazing. In less than nineteen centuries the immemorial foundation of civilized life has disappeared, and the price paid has not been a relapse into barbarism.

As the gradual education of conscience by Christianity has accomplished this, it is impossible to fix any limit to what it may achieve in the future. The ethical function of the Church is to conduct that education; its success in doing so will not depend upon the number of rules which it may make, nor upon the measure of obedience to them, voluntary or compulsory, which it may be able to receive, but upon its grasp of the new principles revealed by the life and death of Christ, and upon the loyalty with which each individual member of the Church applies them to his own conduct whether in private, business, or public life. For this purpose the New Testament will be found to be an indispensable standard of reference.

VIII. INSTITUTIONAL RELIGION

IN the earlier chapters of this book an attempt has been made to emphasize two main points.

First, that the Christian religion is not primarily a system of pure speculation. Its first appeal is to the facts of history. It does not ignore the history of mankind as a whole, but its principal emphasis is on a particular set of events which took place within the lifetime of a single generation. These events are unique, and admittedly of an astonishing character. The Christian view of life is derived from them directly, and can never be separated from them in any way. Indeed, apart from them it is unintelligible and incapable of rational defence. The wide expansion of human knowledge in every direction, and the increasing interest which is being taken in the purely speculative religions and philosophies of the East, make it necessary to recall attention to this point.

For Christianity the truth of these facts is all in all. And they are of so momentous a character that no one can afford to disregard the possibility that they may be true. If any one proposes to treat them as negligible he must first have satisfied himself that the evidence for them is insufficient. If any one proposes to rely upon them he is entitled to be assured that they rest on solid ground.

This leads to the second point: that the evidence for them is in reality rather stronger and more abundant than is sometimes supposed. It is not restricted to the four Gospels, and they are not to be judged as if they were an entirely isolated phenomenon. The earlier books of the New Testament attest the Christian tradition with remarkable uniformity, and their somewhat informal character—they are genuine letters—makes their evidence more cogent than that of more elaborate works. The Gospels, in a sense, explain this tradition by giving an account of the events from which it took its rise. The epistles make certain assumptions which are unintelligible without the Gospels. The Gospels throw light on the beliefs which the epistles reveal, and this fact is a very strong argument in favour of their general credibility.

Moreover, the New Testament is only a small part of the writings which were offered to the Christian world as inspired during the first five centuries of our era. But it is the only part which the Christian world agreed to accept as trustworthy. Our Canon is the outcome of a process of rigorous selection, which is the more impressive because it was not the formal act of any person or assembly. It was made by the general sense of the Christian world, and no one who looks at what remains of the rejected books will want to quarrel with it.

From this it follows that the relation of the Church to the Bible is not quite what is commonly supposed. The New Testament did not appear suddenly as a divine authority upon which the Church has been built. The Christian society came to recognize certain writings as of unique and permanent value, and raised them to the rank of a standard of reference for all time. We owe the New Testament to the Church rather than the Church to the New Testament.

Besides this, an attempt was made in Chapter VII to outline the way in which Christian thinkers must address themselves to problems of conduct. There is in many minds to-day very great confusion as to the nature of Christian ethical principles, and of their applicability to the ordinary affairs of life.

Christian ethics are, admittedly, a large and difficult subject, but part of the perplexity which prevails to-day is not inevitable. It has sprung from a misunderstanding of their real foundation. The Sermon on the Mount has been regarded as the essence of the Gospel, and has been treated as if it were a code of ready-made rules, which have merely to be applied. This is a mistake, and has obscured the real function of the Christian thinker, which is to work out and apply in each generation the principles which spring from the facts of our Lord's life. Christian ethics rest upon the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension, rather than on His recorded sayings. Those who regard Christ as a great teacher and revere His utterances, but stop at that point, are really outside the Christian scheme of things. They may lead exemplary lives from the moral standpoint, but will never really understand the Christian language.

If the memory of these unique events is to be preserved, and if expanding principles for the regulation of conduct are to be

deduced from them by each successive generation, it follows that Christianity must be embodied in institutions of some kind. No religion would be likely to remain true to its original principles for very long unless it possessed accredited and well-informed teachers, just as a community without laws and provision for the administration of justice would very soon forget the meaning of the word Freedom.

A society of any kind must have some means of maintaining its corporate life, if only in the form of a building in which its members can meet from time to time. The Christian society can be no exception to these rules.

Some pious people profess to dislike religious institutions, but it is a fallacy to suppose that Christianity could survive for very long without them. It could never be more than the private possession of a small number of rather exceptional people: and they would diminish as the years went on.

The word *Church* may be interpreted in a variety of ways. It means one very definite thing to a Roman Catholic, and something different, if hardly less definite, to an English Congregationalist. But, whatever the precise significance which we attach to the word, the Church is, and always has been, an absolute necessity. It is not something fortuitous imposed upon an abstract Christianity for convenience' sake. It is the foundation of the entire Christian scheme. It must exist, and it must be organized on the lines of other societies. That is to say—it must possess rules of some kind, it must hold property for its purposes, and it must have its recognized officers. It must make certain demands upon its members, and must have (at least in theory) the power of depriving them of their membership if these demands are not met.

Common sense would concede as much as this to any club, for whatever purpose it might be organized. But the Church's claim goes farther. It believes that however much it may be marred by the weakness, folly, or wickedness of its members, it is an expression of the mind of God. Moreover, its existence helps to attest the fact, which in modern times is often overlooked, that the community is prior to the individuals of which it is composed. Individual rights must be limited by those of the community, not only *de facto* for the sake of the stability of society, but also

de jure, because the community has a corporate life of its own. The idea that the individual strikes his own private bargain with the community on his own terms, claiming exactly as much as he likes and conceding only what he chooses, is a fallacy. Where the State is concerned attempts to act freely upon this theory are forcibly restrained. The Church has no coercive power, and in religious matters the moral right of the individual to regard himself as independent of the community is to most people axiomatic. But it is irreconcilably opposed to the Christian conception of life. There is perhaps no one thing more needed by English religion to-day than a juster sense of the real relation between the individual Christian and the Christian society as a whole.

In other words: increased respect for the authority of the Church, based on more accurate comprehension of its nature and scope.

There are probably not many people who really believe that the Christian religion is dying. Those that there are represent a type of mind which is fast disappearing. But the opinion is often expressed that religious institutions have passed their zenith and have now entered upon a period of decline. Their decay may be very gradual, but is inevitable, and religion can only hope to flourish if it can succeed in disentangling itself from them.

It is, of course, unlikely that society will ever again be dominated by ecclesiastical persons as it was in Europe during the Middle Ages. Nor is this to be desired. But all past experience goes to show that no idea or principle of any kind can maintain itself for very long without embodying itself in institutions of some kind, unless perhaps within a small circle of select spirits. Until the world has come to be inhabited entirely by philosophers (a contingency too remote to inspire either hope or apprehension at the moment) it is safe to say that no religion, least of all perhaps, the Christian religion, will ever be an effective force without institutions. If Christian institutions, if every visible organization which any one can fairly describe as *The Church* are on the way to extinction, the Christian religion is, for all practical purposes, on the way to extinction too. It is therefore of real importance to consider whether those who think

that religious institutions are decaying, and must continue to decay until they disappear, are right or wrong.

A general inquiry into institutional religion as a whole could hardly be restricted to Christianity, and would be equally beyond my capacity and the scope of these pages. But it will not be irrelevant to offer, as a small contribution to such an inquiry, some observations upon the present position and immediate prospects of the Church of England.

No apology for selecting that communion is necessary. The Church of England is an object of legitimate interest to all Englishmen, whether they are members of it or not. If it were to be overwhelmed by any disaster, that would be more than a national catastrophe. It is not too much to say that the effect would be felt throughout the world. And there is probably no other communion whose influence, direct and indirect, extends so far beyond its own immediate borders. The interest taken in the proposed revision of the Book of Common Prayer by avowed Nonconformists who (presumably) have never used the old book, and do not propose to use the new one, is an illustration of this.

The first point which must be taken into account is the assertion that attendance at public worship has fallen off very much of late years. There is probably some truth in this statement, but it is very difficult to speak positively, because no trustworthy statistics are available. Nobody really knows what proportion of the population went to Church habitually fifty years ago, nor what proportion goes now. It is quite possible that there is a tendency to idealize the past. If Church-going has diminished that may be merely a temporary phase, due in part to the dislocation of all settled habits produced by the late war. Some responsibility may also attach to the motor-car, and more to the motor-bicycle. Both are still something of novelties. (It might be interesting to know whether Church-going was considered to be affected by the introduction of railways, but no evidence on the point appears to be available.)

If people in general do not go to Church as much as they did Sunday by Sunday, that does not necessarily prove that religious feeling is becoming weaker. Special services on special occasions (such as the recent celebrations of the 1,300th anniversary of York Minster) attract very large crowds, and it would be unfair

to assume that any considerable proportion of such congregations is drawn by nothing better than curiosity. At any rate, our cathedrals are more used and better attended than appears to have been common even half a century ago.

During the late war, and the years which followed immediately, it was asserted frequently and widely that the Church had failed. The authors of this charge would probably have had some difficulty in explaining exactly what they meant by it, and seldom attempted to suggest any remedy which could be adopted. Vague as the accusation was, the fact that it was brought is of interest and importance. In the great majority of instances at least the authors of it were neither frivolous nor captious. They were entirely sincere and very much in earnest. They would not have said what they did if they had not had a real sense of the importance of the Church's mission to the nation. They may not always have been well-informed; but there can be no question that the last twelve years have revealed a very widespread feeling that in times of national peril and difficulty a very great deal is to be expected of the Church.

I know of no evidence of such expectation during the Napoleonic wars, and this points to the conclusion that religious institutions hold a higher place in the public estimation now than they did a hundred and twenty years ago.

Nothing of the nature of a religious census has ever been taken in England, so that the numerical strength of the Church has never been exactly ascertained. No estimate which can be made can lay claim to any high degree of accuracy. It is said that about 70 per cent. of the men who joined the army during the late war declared themselves to be members of the Church of England, but it was obvious that in many instances this meant very little.

It is certain that a large number of people do not even profess to belong to the Church, and that a large number of those who do sit very loosely to the moral obligations of their membership, and are almost completely ignorant of everything which the Church teaches.

Every one must regard this as regrettable. But before sweeping charges of wholesale failure are brought against the Church on the strength of these facts, it is necessary to try to form some

conception of the nature of the task to which the Church has had to address itself in the past. The words *Success* and *Failure* cannot be applied fairly without reference to the difficulties which have had to be met, and the opportunities for overcoming them which have been enjoyed, and the efforts which have actually been made.

In some eyes the fact that the Church of England is *established*, which means, roughly, that it has an intimate and organic connexion with the State, confers an overwhelming advantage upon it. This is, however, disputable. If Establishment brings certain advantages in its train, experience shows that it is capable of placing serious obstacles in the Church's path. An established Church has a responsibility for the entire nation which cannot be shared by any other communion. It is also liable to be affected very deeply by the political fortunes of the State.

No criticism of the Church of England as it stands to-day can be just unless some account is taken of the outstanding political, social, and economic changes of the last three hundred and fifty years.

The Reformation in England was not so drastic as upon the Continent, and before the end of the sixteenth century there were people who thought that it had not gone far enough. They would have preferred a complete breach with the past, and the institution of a new religious society on Swiss or German lines. During the first thirty years of the seventeenth century this party gained strength, especially in the towns, and the victory of Parliament in the civil war gave them complete political supremacy. One use which they made of their power was to destroy the Church. Episcopacy was abolished by Act of Parliament and a presbyterian form of church-government substituted for it. The clergy were forcibly expelled from their benefices and many of them were reduced to destitution. Some died of the ill-usage which they received. It was a criminal offence even to possess a copy of the Book of Common Prayer.

For eleven years the Church of England endured relentless persecution which aimed at exterminating it once for all.

The restoration of the monarchy naturally brought with it the restoration of the Church. The surviving bishops and clergy were reinstated in the offices from which they had been expelled, and

the puritan ministers who were unwilling to acquiesce in the new régime by S. Bartholomew's Day 1662, were compelled to vacate their positions.

The moral effect upon the Church of such a political triumph cannot have been entirely good, and the practical difficulty of finding men to staff all the churches must have been considerable, as there had been no ordinations for some fifteen years. The qualifications of a considerable number of the Restoration clergy were probably slight, and the general tone of the Church low. The next twenty-five years saw some improvement, but then came the conscientious attempt of James II to force Roman Catholicism on the country by means of an arbitrary and unconstitutional exercise of the authority of the Crown.

The successful resistance of the seven Bishops[1] raised the Church to a height of popularity which it has never reached since. It was universally recognized as the champion of constitutional freedom.

When the revolution had placed William and Mary upon the throne the prospects of the Church of England must have appeared brighter than at any time within living memory. But the archbishop, five other bishops, and more than four hundred clergy felt that Parliament could not absolve them from the oath of allegiance which they had taken to James II. It was, therefore, impossible for them to take an oath to the new sovereigns, and they were deprived of their offices. They were not molested by the Government, but went into voluntary retirement, carrying with them an unknown but considerable number of laity.

The non-jurors,[2] as they were called, continued as a recognizable body until 1715. If their conception of loyalty was open to criticism, they took from the Church a body of piety and learning

[1] Sancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury, Lloyd of S. Asaph, Turner of Ely, Lake of Chichester, Ken of Bath and Wells, White of Peterborough, and Trelawny of Bristol. The immediate issue was a command from the King to have read in all churches a declaration of religious toleration. The Bishops' point was that the declaration had not been authorized by Parliament, and was therefore an illegal attempt to set aside the law of the land by royal dispensation.

[2] i. e. those who had not taken the oath. It is said that their descendants exist at the present day.

which it could ill spare. Yet the Church itself was not to blame for the calamity.

The death of Anne brought fresh difficulties of a new character. The throne of the first two Georges was not very secure, and the Government saw in the Church a possible source of danger. Many of the clergy were suspected of Jacobite sympathies, and steps were taken to prevent them from becoming effective. On 17 May 1717 the Convocations of Canterbury and York were silenced by an arbitrary exercise of the royal supremacy. They continued to meet, but for 135 years were not allowed to transact any business. When its ancient synods had been suppressed in everything but name, the Church's one means of forming or voicing any corporate opinion, or of initiating any reform, was destroyed.

Bishops were appointed primarily for their known loyalty to the House of Hanover, and were often out of sympathy with many of their clergy. Attendance at Court or in the House of Lords was considered to have first claim on their time. There were, of course, faithful pastors among them as among the parochial clergy. But speaking generally a torpor settled upon the Church, which was exactly what the Government desired. The Church was not allowed to be effective lest it should become dangerous.

Thus for more than a century after the outbreak of the Civil War the course of political events was almost unbrokenly adverse to the Church. So far as there is any single cause for this it is due to the fact that from 1690 onwards the male members of the House of Stuart were conscientious Roman Catholics.

The second half of the eighteenth century was a period of financial stringency, which increased steadily until the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth. This was due to the prolonged and costly wars, and the heavy taxation which they involved. The loss of the American Colonies was a severe economic blow. The value of money fell rapidly, with the result that the stipends of many benefices became quite inadequate. This led to what is known as *pluralism*, whereby an incumbent was allowed to hold several benefices at once, and to maintain a curate in those in which he did not reside. Some arrangement of the kind was inevitable, and was the least bad course possible in the

circumstances. Probably it need not have been carried as far as it was.

At the present day similar economic pressure[1] is making it necessary for two or more adjacent parishes in country districts to be held by one incumbent. The arrangement probably does less harm now than it did, because the standard of duty is higher, and means of locomotion have improved. But no one can maintain that it is theoretically desirable.

The evangelical revival, which in the opinion of some saved England from something like the French Revolution, showed what could be done for personal religion even under very unpromising conditions.

The Methodist movement began within the Church, but Wesley's disregard of the rights of his brother clergy, whose parishes he felt himself entitled to invade, made him a difficult subject, and the emotional scenes which marked many of his meetings naturally gave rise to considerable doubt and anxiety. When he took it upon himself to appoint men to do the work of Bishops in America, he made a schism between his disciples and the Church inevitable. This was in 1784. As far back as 1760 his lay preachers had begun to administer the Sacraments in chapels of their own.

When the Wesleyan Methodists became a separate body, they took from the Church a volume of fervent piety which it could ill afford to lose. It is not, however, easy to see how a permanent place for them could have been found within the system of the Church. If the loss were real, who must be counted responsible for it?

While the Church was still labouring in the slough of economic difficulties England was swept by what is often called the Industrial Revolution. In little more than two generations the development of steam-machinery transformed the country from a thinly-populated, mainly agricultural, community into a crowded and mainly manufacturing one.

Population increased with unparalleled rapidity, and people streamed from the country-side, especially in the north, into huge formless towns, which have been a fertile seed-plot of difficult

[1] And the fact that the number of clergy is inadequate. See below, p. 196.

social problems ever since. The Church was confronted with a new situation which its system was not designed to meet.

The parochial system had grown up gradually during a thousand years, and was based upon the village, or small country town. It assumed the rural, or semi-rural, community containing representatives of every social class, small enough for the incumbent to do his work single-handed, and to know every one of his parishioners personally.

Quite suddenly this state of things passed away. The population of many parishes swelled to unmanageable proportions. The Church's equipment became quite inadequate, and as the new towns contained large areas of almost unbroken poverty, it became almost impossible to provide clergy, churches, or schools where the need for them was most urgent.

By 1818 the nation was so deeply impressed with the seriousness of the situation that the sum of one million pounds was voted by Parliament for building churches, and in 1824 a further sum of £500,000[1]; the provisions of the latter grant extending to Scotland. No exact figures are available, but it is estimated that more than twice as much was raised by private contributions during the same period.

A mass of statistics would be out of place here. A glance at the pages of any ecclesiastical directory will afford some idea of the number of churches which have been built or rebuilt since the beginning of the last century. Besides this, the Church has spent immense sums on building and maintaining elementary schools. The National Society for the Promotion of the Education of the Poor in the principles of the Established Church was founded in 1811. The first Education Bill was introduced into Parliament in 1820, and the first grant from public funds (£20,000) was made in 1833.

When the see of Ripon was constituted in 1836 no new bishopric had been founded in England since the reign of Henry VIII. Since 1836 nineteen new bishoprics have been created in England, and two in Wales, and the see of Bristol has been separated from that of Gloucester.

Critics of the Church to-day do not perhaps always realize the

[1] These are the only sums of public money which the Church has ever received, excluding grants for educational purposes.

magnitude of the task which it has had to undertake, owing to economic and social changes for which it is in no way responsible. Still less in many instances are they aware of the extent of the efforts which have been made to grapple with the new situation. If they have proved inadequate, they are probably without parallel in the history of any other religious communion in any part of the world.

If, as is sometimes asserted, a large proportion of the population of England to-day is almost entirely ignorant of the elements of the Christian religion, it cannot be said that the Church has not laboured to bring opportunities for learning within their reach. These opportunities are, in fact, abundant for all who are willing to make use of them, or capable of doing so.

An outstanding event in the religious history of the nineteenth century was the Oxford Movement, or as it is sometimes called *The Catholic Revival.*

It is generally considered to have begun with an Assize sermon preached at Oxford on 14 July 1833, under the title *National Apostacy.* The preacher[1] protested vigorously against proposals to redistribute certain ecclesiastical revenues, which seemed to him to be an invasion by the State of the rights of the Church.

The Oxford Movement laid stress upon the points which the evangelical revival had tended to ignore. It dwelt much upon the historic continuity of the Church of England, and upon what it has in common with the churches of Rome and the East. It emphasized the real value of Sacraments, the corporate life of the Church, and the measure of independence of the State which the Church of England is entitled to claim.

The views of the leaders were regarded in many quarters with dislike and fear, which was not diminished when in 1845 John Henry Newman, who was the most prominent figure, seceded to the Roman Catholic Church, and took a number of distinguished followers with him. In spite of this, Tractarian[2] opinions made their way, as they deserved to do. The Bishop of Gloucester has expressed the opinion that the Movement was a failure in respect

[1] John Keble.

[2] The name is derived from the fact that in the early stages of the movement, the leaders issued a number of pamphlets under the title *Tracts for the Times.*

of its popular appeal. It has always been academic, appealing rather to the cultivated than to the great body of people; and at the present day it has very little hold on the great mass of the English people.[1]

This appears to be, upon the whole, a just judgement. There is, however, no doubt that it influenced the clergy very widely and deeply. In the opinion of some it drove a wedge between them and the laity with unfortunate results which have not yet worked themselves out. However this may be, it certainly led to a higher standard of clerical duty, and an increased care, which was at least well-intentioned, for the fabric and furniture of churches.

As the corporate life of the Church became more vigorous, a new and unforeseen difficulty arose. Parliament is the supreme governing body of the Church of England, and there are therefore many things (e.g. the formation of new bishoprics) which cannot be carried out without Parliamentary sanction. It was necessary on every occasion when the Church desired to do anything upon any considerable scale to introduce into Parliament a Bill for the purpose. These Bills had to be discussed exactly like Bills of any other kind.

From the accession of Queen Elizabeth to that of Queen Victoria little fault could be found with this arrangement. Both Houses consisted entirely of Churchmen, and represented the laity as well as any other assembly which could have been brought together. But as the nineteenth century went on a change came over the situation.

Nonconformists, Roman Catholics, Jews, and, in some few instances, men who professed no religion of any kind, became members of the House of Commons, and, in smaller numbers, of the House of Lords.

Parliament became, as a body, increasingly incompetent to deal with Church affairs, and increasingly reluctant to do so.

Besides this, the volume of business of other kinds which has to come before Parliament increased so much, that even the most friendly Government found it almost impossible to give any time to Church legislation. A Bill introduced by a private member had virtually no chance of ever being discussed.

[1] *The Anglican Revival*, by Y. Brilioth, Preface, p. x. (Longmans, 1925.)

By the beginning of the present century the deadlock was almost complete. The Church could not do many things which its leaders thought necessary, or at least expedient, without the sanction which Parliament could not find time to give. Once again, the Church was seriously hampered in the efficient performance of its work by causes for which it could not fairly be held responsible.

A remedy was found in 1919 by the passage of what is known as *The Enabling Act.* By this Act Parliament sanctioned the creation of a body called *The Church Assembly,* which has power to make legislative proposals relating to the Church. The proposed measures can be discussed at any length in the Assembly, as it exists primarily for that purpose, and are then laid before Parliament in their completed form. Parliament can accept or reject them *in toto,* but cannot alter them in any way, so that the amount of parliamentary discussion necessary is reduced to a *minimum.* It is now possible to legislate for the Church with an ease and rapidity unknown at any time since the Reformation.

The Assembly consists of three Houses—Bishops, Clergy, and Laity. The two first were ready to hand in the Convocations of the two provinces of Canterbury and York.

The House of Bishops consists of the two upper Houses of Convocation, i.e. of all the diocesan Bishops of England, *ex officio.*

The House of Clergy consists of the two lower Houses of Convocation, i.e. of all Deans and two Archdeacons from every diocese in England, who sit *ex officio,* together with certain elected representatives of the Clergy (Proctors). As a rule two proctors are elected by the clergy of each archdeaconry, but some of the larger archdeaconries are allowed three.

Bishops-suffragan have no seat as such. But they may sit as archdeacons, or be elected as proctors for the clergy.

The formation of a House of Laity was more difficult. Unless a scheme which Parliament would regard as satisfactory could be devised, the Enabling Act would not have been passed, and for that an effective and elective House of Laity was necessary. Houses of Laity had been appended to Convocation, but their statutory position was uncertain, and they would not have been accepted by Parliament.

To meet this need the Act provided for the formation in every

parish of what is known as a *Parochial Church Council.* Such Councils were already in existence in some places on a voluntary basis, but possessed no real authority of any kind, and could be dissolved by the Incumbent if he thought fit. The association has now become a statutory corporation, whose duty it is to co-operate with the Incumbent in the work of the Church, and a large part of the former duties of Churchwardens have been transferred to it. The Incumbent is Chairman of the Council, *ex officio.* Members of the Council have to be *bona fide* communicants over 21 years of age, and are elected annually at the Annual Church Meeting, which has taken the place of the old Easter Vestry.

The electors are those who have placed their names on the electoral roll of the parish. This roll is a list of those who have signed a declaration that they have been baptized, are not members of any body not in communion with the Church of England, and have reached the age of eighteen.

One member of the Church Council for every five hundred names on the electoral roll of the parish is elected to the diocesan conference, which is now a statutory body instead of a purely voluntary association. The diocesan conference elects to the House of Laity one member for every ten thousand names on the electoral rolls of the diocese.

This procedure may appear cumbrous, and is open to certain obvious criticisms. The parishes do not elect directly to the Assembly, and the number of names entered on the electoral rolls has been disappointing. However, time may rectify this. It is hard to see any alternative system which would produce a House of Laity with any real title to be regarded as representative of the Church.

The full strength of the Church Assembly is about 700, of whom just over half are members of the House of Laity. Women are as eligible for election as men. The three Houses can sit together or separately. On certain points voting may be 'by Houses', and in that case the proposal under consideration is not passed unless it is supported by a majority in each House.

The scheme is still too new for any positive opinion as to its success or failure to be pronounced. It is obvious that its effects, which have probably not yet been fully felt, must be very far

reaching. It has affected very deeply the immemorial relation between the parson and his parishioners, and between the rank and file of the parishioners and their church. The independence of the parson, which has been upon the whole a very powerful lever for good, has been deliberately destroyed, and the theory that every baptized Englishman was a member of the Church unless he had by his own act transferred his allegiance elsewhere has been abandoned. The relation between the Church and Parliament has also been modified.

This very brief sketch will be sufficient to show that whatever the ultimate outcome of the new régime may be, it is a whole-hearted attempt to make the administrative machinery of the Church easier to manipulate and more efficient in its working. If it has not yet fulfilled all the hopes of its promoters, some of the forebodings of its critics have not been entirely justified.

In July 1927 the Assembly gave 'final approval' to a revision of the Book of Common Prayer, representing the outcome of twenty years' work. If the House of Commons had not refused to sanction the new book it would have come into use before the end of 1928.

The present prayer book has been in use since 1662. The new one[1] must be regarded as an honest attempt to take account of the happenings of the last two hundred and fifty years, and to make public worship a more real and living thing than it is at present.

Add to all this that in 1884, after fourteen years' work, the Church produced a new and more accurate translation of the Scriptures, and it becomes difficult to see what more could have been done during the last hundred and twenty years to bring 'plant', administration, and worship abreast of modern and somewhat kaleidoscopic needs.

It is true that no attempt has yet been made to produce an authorized hymn-book, and obvious that the need for one is great. But save for this omission (which does not seem to attract any large volume of resentful attention), what is there which it was or is within the Church's power to do which has not been done?[2] Can any other institution of any kind in the country

[1] More accurately—the additions to and departures from the old book which it is proposed to authorize.

[2] Reference must also be made to the work of the Ecclesiastical Com-

show a more remarkable record of sustained and varied effort to equip itself more thoroughly for the discharge of its functions? Have the Bar, the College of Surgeons, the Admiralty, or the War Office shown greater zeal for making themselves effective in the public service, or greater energy in carrying out such changes as have appeared to be desirable or necessary?

These are questions which must be weighed before indiscriminate charges of failure can, with any show of justice, be brought against the Church of England.

We might therefore conclude that the immediate prospects of the Church of England are brighter now than at any time since the Restoration at least. There is, however, one very alarming feature in the situation, namely the lack of candidates for Holy Orders.[1]

At the beginning of the present century the number of men ordained to the ministry of the Church of England each year was about 700. This was below the average for the previous twenty-five years, and was generally regarded as inadequate. Accordingly efforts were made to augment the supply by raising large sums of money to educate for the ministry men whose parents could not afford to educate them themselves.[2] In spite of this the process of decline was not completely arrested, and in one year between 1900 and 1915 the total fell to 585. The stress of war necessarily dammed the supply at the source, and in 1918 the number sank to 101.

Peace brought a rapid rise which culminated in 1923 in a total of 463. The figure for 1924 was 436, and since then the annual average has been about 370. There is no apparent prospect of any considerable change in the immediate future.

missioners. This corporation was created by Act of Parliament in 1836 to take over episcopal estates and some other ecclesiastical funds. Within the limits prescribed by the Act they have handled the finances of the Church with a sagacity and foresight which are perhaps without parallel elsewhere. They came to what was almost chaos: it is not too much to say that but for what they have done the system of the Church would have broken down long ago.

[1] Other religious bodies are said to be confronted with the same difficulty, both in England and elsewhere.

[2] Since the war these have been expanded widely. Probably more than half the clergy ordained the last five years have been subsidized from one or more sources.

For the last fourteen years the number of men ordained has not even kept pace with the losses by death and retirement, to say nothing of providing for expansion both at home and abroad. There are about 5,000 fewer clergy at work in England to-day than there were at the beginning of the century.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the seriousness of this fact. It is obvious that the most perfect system will avail very little unless an adequate supply of men to work it is forthcoming. Unless the parishes can be properly staffed the Church cannot hope to be an effective force in the life of the nation. The number of places in which the clergy can count on any considerable amount of efficient and systematic lay help, such as Church Councils are supposed to render, is very small. The great majority of the laity are too fully occupied with trying to earn their own living to have much time, energy, or inclination for work of other kinds. The lay members of the Church Assembly come, for the most part, from well-to-do neighbourhoods where there are plenty of comparatively wealthy and leisured people, and it is obvious that they do not understand the conditions under which the Church's work has to be done in nine parishes out of ten throughout the country.

It is sometimes asserted that fewer clergy are required now, because the State has expanded the range of its educational and philanthropic activities. It is, however, doubtful whether those who comfort themselves and their audiences with such statements have much first-hand knowledge of what there is to be done in a parish, and of what actually goes on day by day in a Vicarage house. Moreover, if fewer clergy are needed it is not obvious why it should be thought necessary to have more Bishops. A Bishop is very much assisted in his work by the invention of the motor-car; he can supervise effectively to-day a larger area than was possible thirty years ago. The only justification for dividing dioceses and multiplying suffragans is that there is more work to be done than ever before. And if there is more work for Bishops it is not easy to see how there can be less for clergy. If an army requires more general officers, it is unlikely to be effective with fewer regimental ones.

Conferences and congresses of one kind and another may be well-attended, and may sketch imposing programmes. Inter-

minable committees may be multiplied indefinitely, and the Church Assembly may prepare innumerable measures for Parliament. But the parochial clergy, at least, know that none of these things count for much with the rank and file of the Church. Religion is only remotely affected by them at best. What really matters is personal pastoral work, visiting houses, talking to individuals, and—above all—listening to them. For all this there is no substitute: by this religion really stands or falls in the country as a whole. This work occupies so much time that it cannot be done on any adequate scale unless a large number of men are available to do it day by day.[1] No preaching which has not behind it the knowledge and sympathy which cannot be acquired in any other way, will afford any real help to perplexed and struggling souls.

In large town parishes the number of people to whom the Church means nothing will increase steadily if an adequate supply of assistant-curates cannot be obtained. In many places the population changes rapidly: partly because there are a large number of two-year appointments in connexion with banks and some departments of the Post Office. New-comers will, in most instances, be lost unless they are discovered promptly, and their arrival may pass unnoticed for many months unless every part of the parish can be 'visited' with unremitting diligence.

In the country periodical visits from the incumbent of the next parish—or the next but one if more than two are held together—are no substitute for an incumbent living permanently in the place. The Church must do the best it can in the present distress; but it is really idle to imagine that there is any substitute for personal work, or that that work can be done with fewer clergy than before.

It is true that many educational posts which in the past have generally been filled by clergy are now, in increasing numbers held by laymen. Schools and universities can manage with fewer clergy than formerly, but it is not certain that the change is entirely for the better, and the number of men involved is small.

The decline in the number of candidates for Holy Orders is due

[1] In the large rural deanery of Leeds there were 56 fewer clergy in October 1927 than in October 1910. This means that the amount of pastoral work which can be done is diminished by one third.

to a variety of converging causes, and therefore does not admit of a single remedy. Undoubtedly the economic factor, the impoverishment of the land-owning and professional classes, is an important one. But the fact that the most expensive schools and universities are fuller than they have ever been before, shows that there are plenty of parents who can afford to educate their sons for any calling.

It would be outside the scope of these pages to attempt any discussion of causes or remedies. But the fact must be taken into account in any attempt to estimate the prospects of the Church. No one can deny that it is at least a formidable counterpoise to the very solid grounds for hopefulness enumerated above.

The question is sometimes asked—*For what does the Church of England really stand?* It is a comprehensive one, and in the mouths of those who put it seems generally to mean—'To what clear, brief, systematic body of teaching can you point of which it could fairly be said—In the eyes of the Church of England this is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?'

The question is important—none the less because it does not admit of the type of answer which those who put it appear to desire to receive. The Church of England has never identified itself with the opinions of any individual thinker, such as Luther, Calvin, or Wesley. It has never labelled itself in a way which defines its system or beliefs—as (for example) Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Anabaptists, and Unitarians have done. The only descriptive adjective which it recognizes as applicable to itself is the comprehensive word *Catholic*.[1] It has always refused to attempt precise definition of important points, e.g. the exact nature of the gift conveyed by the Sacraments, the meaning of the word *Inspiration* as applied to the Scriptures, or the significance of episcopacy. It has, in fact, always allowed considerable divergence of opinion on these and other points, and has never accepted the theory that truth can be determined by the pronouncement of authority. It affirms expressly that any authority may be wrong in any given instance.[2]

What the Church of England really stands for, though many of its members may be hardly conscious of the fact, is a particular

[1] e.g. in the prayer *for all conditions of men.*

[2] Article XIX, *Of the Church.*

theory of the nature of truth, and of the methods by which truth can be ascertained. This is sometimes described loosely as *comprehensiveness*. Comprehensiveness seems often to be understood to mean the toleration of mutually exclusive opinions, because there is no authority capable of deciding what is true, or as merely equivalent to compromise. In this sense it is not an accurate description of the attitude of the Church. The Church maintains that divergent opinions which may on the surface appear to be mutually exclusive are not so in reality, but will eventually prove to be the necessary complement of each other. Each of them is true, but not of itself the whole truth.[1] The possible aspects of truth are too many and varied to be expressed easily in a short and simple formula. The doctrinal directness which many people desire can only be had at the risk, so grave as to amount to a certainty, of surrendering something which we cannot really afford to lose.

Since the Reformation at least, there have always been in the Church of England representatives of the Schools of thought which to-day are labelled *Anglo-Catholic*, *Evangelical*, and *Modernist*. Each of them has presented in the past, and does present to-day, some regrettable features, but each has, at its best, some real contribution to make to the fullness of our grasp of the divine revelation. It would be a real calamity if any one of them were to succeed in extinguishing the other two.

A Church bold enough to adopt this theory of truth demands a high moral and intellectual standard in its members. In the eyes of the impatient and ill-informed it will appear vacillating and timid: those who desire to dispose of their own moral responsibility by relying on simple direction from some external guide will find it disappointing. All these classes of persons, and perhaps others besides, will tend to assert that the Church does not know its own mind: which really means that it knows more than is

[1] The most apt illustration of this known to me I owe to a speech delivered by the Bishop of Oxford in the Leeds Town Hall on 31 May 1927.

'If a farmer, a botanist, and a poet were all contemplating the same field of corn simultaneously, the ideas which it would suggest to each of them would differ considerably. They would feel moved to say about it things which might appear to have nothing whatever in common. What each said would be true, but each would have missed something if he did not hear what the other two had got to tell him.'

present to their minds. It is worth noting that we have for a considerable period conducted our public affairs on the principle of including, not only within the State but actually within the walls of Parliament, parties whose opinions and aims diverge very widely indeed. This might be regarded as a possible source of national weakness. Yet politically we are not among the weakest or least successful nations. And the late war showed that, contrary to the expectation of some foreign observers, we are not incapable of concerted and vigorous action on a large scale when need arises.

It is at least possible that the apparent confusion of thought within the Church, which offers an easy target for the shafts of ridicule and sarcasm, is a source of strength rather than weakness. It is certain that the theory of truth which lies behind it has saved the Church of England from identifying itself irrevocably for ever with any particular period of its own past, or from closing any avenue through which any ray of further illumination may come at any future time.

For these reasons it is not too much to say that the Church of England is uniquely fitted to play the part of mediator between, or if we prefer so to put it, to throw a bridge between, the reformed communions and Rome and the Eastern Churches. Especial emphasis appears to have been laid on this at the conference on Faith and Order held at Lausanne during August 1927 by some of the English speakers, and the idea is said to have been somewhat of a novelty to the representatives of the reformed communions of the Continent.

If to the question—For what does the Church of England really stand?—the right answer be—For the only conception of the nature of truth which can ever make the re-union of Christendom possible, then no member of it need be troubled by doubts as to whether he has given his loyalty to an unworthy or failing cause, and it is hard to see how any Christian man can fail to wish the Church well, wherever his personal allegiance may chance to lie.[1]

[1] The Roman Catholic has, of course, an alternative theory which is simpler. He holds that truth is perfectly defined by and fully contained within the pronouncements which may be made from time to time by authority. In his eyes Re-union means universal submission to the Papacy, and cannot be attained by any other means. A rough analogy would be

One of the earliest counsels ever given to a Christian community was—*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.*[1] One of the last utterances, perhaps the latest of all, which the Christian world regards as of apostolic authority is—*My little children, guard yourselves from idols.*[2] Experience suggests that it is impossible to live up to either of these injunctions without a high degree of courage and resolution. The Church which tries honestly to be faithful to both has set itself a very difficult task. It will have, amongst other things, to make plain that it regards religion as something which has to be learned, much as we learn a foreign language. It will have to regard its clergy as being primarily teachers, and to be ready to listen to what they have to say—however unfamiliar or disconcerting their message may appear. It will have to demand a considerable measure of self-discipline, both moral and intellectual, from all its members, because without this nothing worth learning can ever be learned; and to maintain that while emotion has a real place in religious life, it is no easy substitute for more austere qualities. It will entirely mistrust all short cuts to desired goals, and all simple solutions of large problems. It will deprecate nothing more than any form of impatience: indeed it would count it the highest praise were men able to point to it and say—*Here is the patience of the saints, they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.*[3]

In the keeping of such a Church the fullness of the Christian revelation will be safe; and, whatever may befall, it will be able to face the future with humble confidence.

The future of religion will lie with the Church which is most honest and successful in its attempts to make these two injunctions the guiding rules of its corporate activity and of the lives of its individual members.

if an Englishman asserted that peace and freedom are impossible until the British Empire has absorbed the whole world.

1 *I Thess.* 5[21]. 2 *I John* 5[21]. 3 *Rev.* 14[12].

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